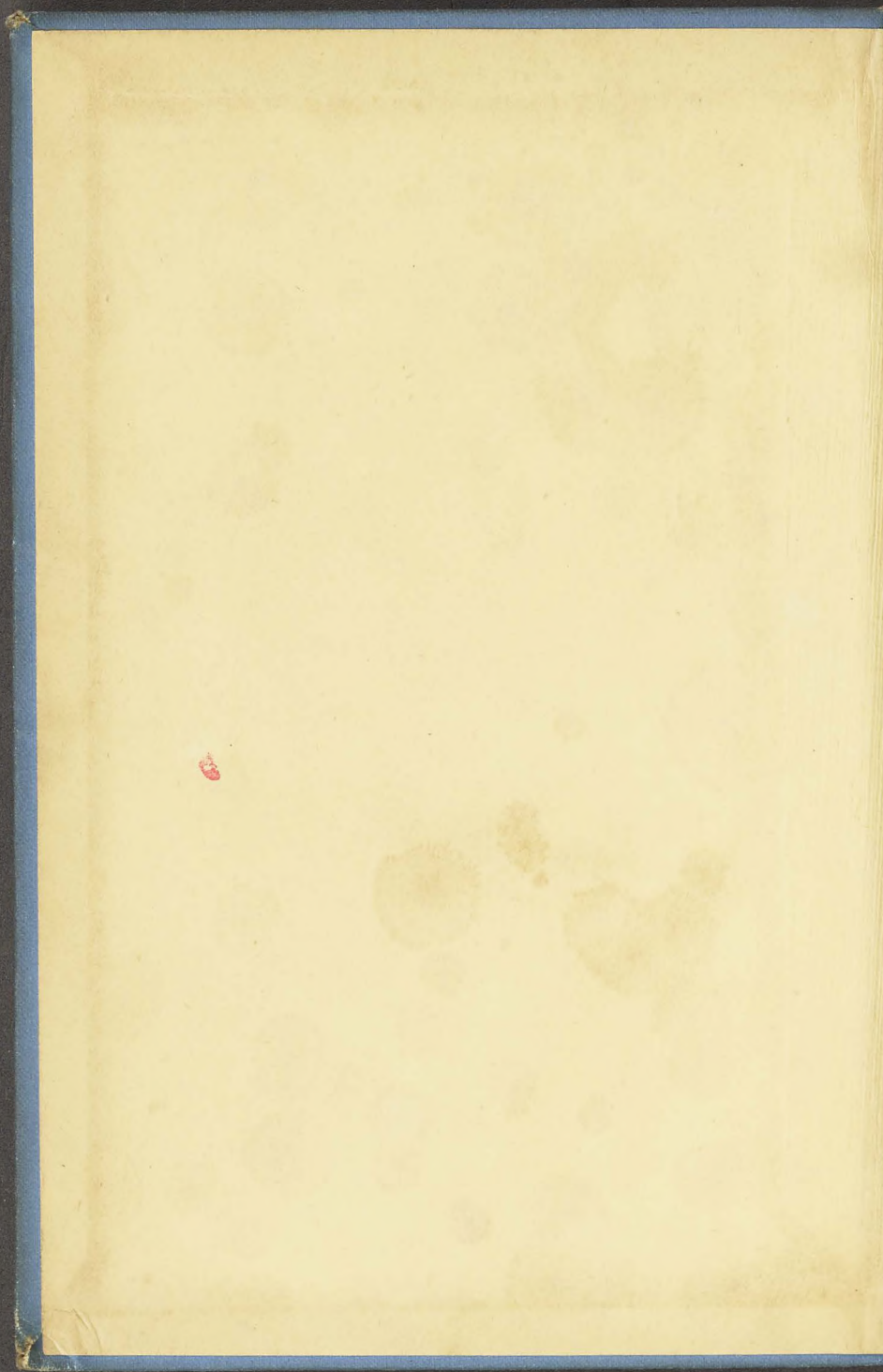


LOSING AND - FINDING

OR THE
MOONSTONE
RING



by
JENNIE CHAPPELL

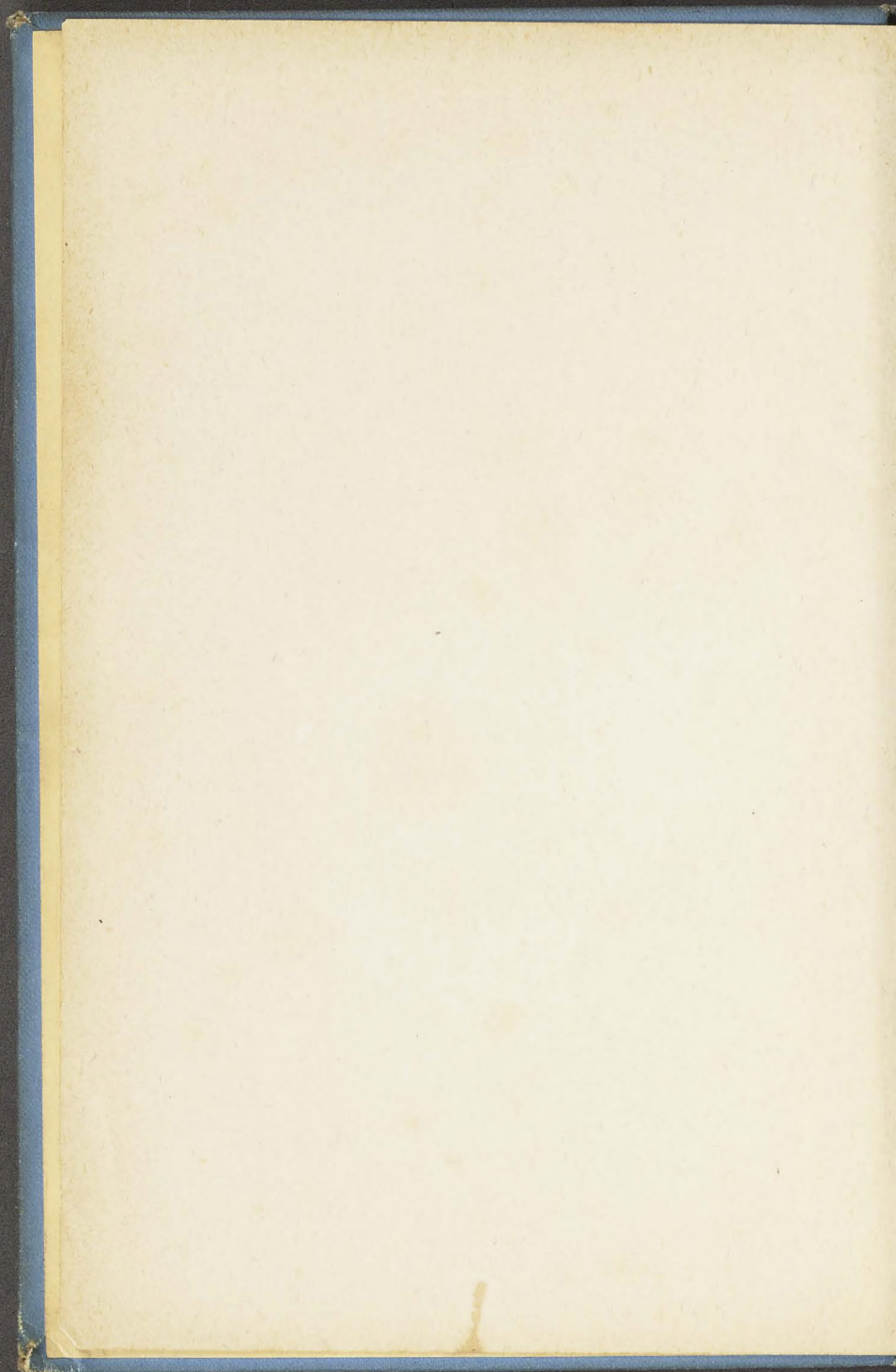


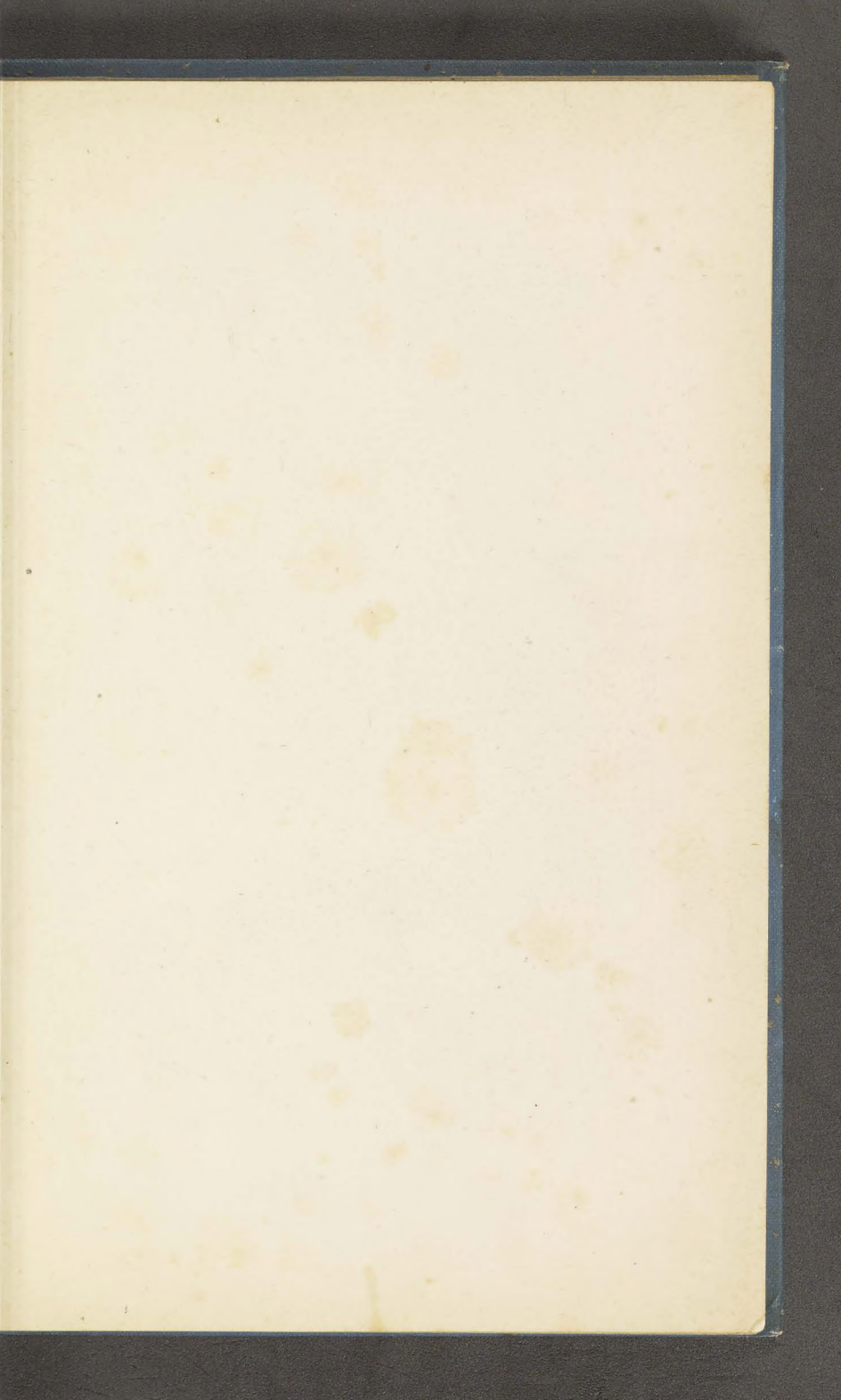
To Letty
with love from

A. Vening.

Dec: 5th 1893









"THE SPARKLING TREASURES LAY REVEALED UPON THEIR VELVET BEDS,"
[p. 10.]

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LOSING AND FINDING;

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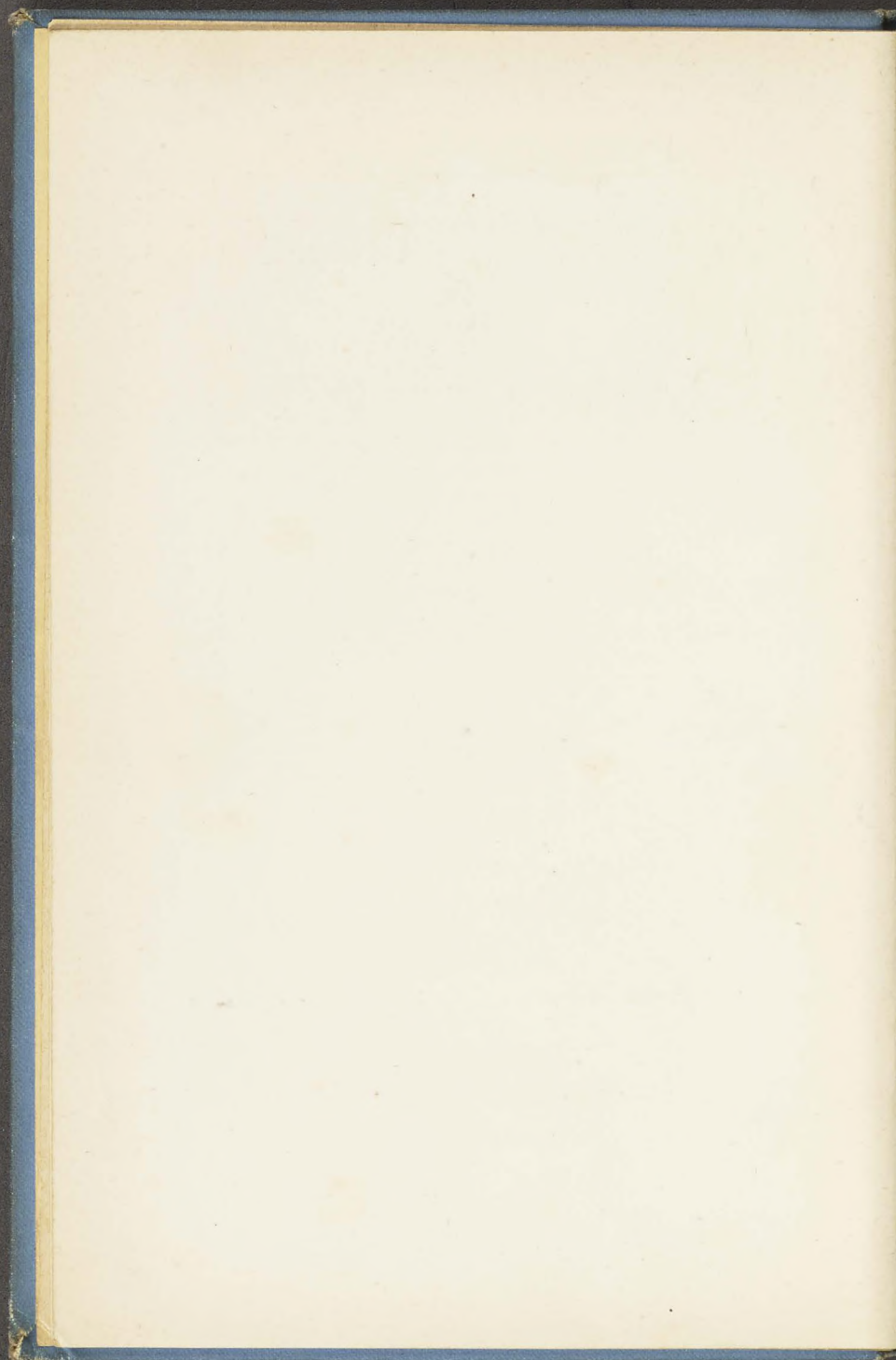
JENNIE CHAPPELL,

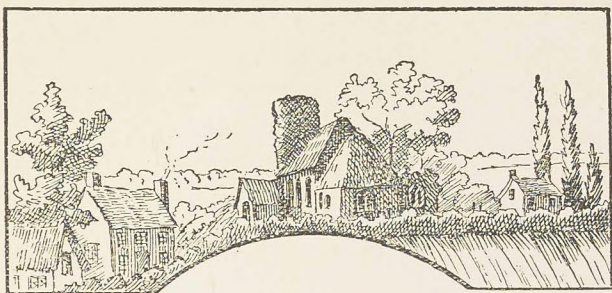
AUTHOR OF "WHO WAS THE CULPRIT?" "THE MAN OF THE FAMILY," ETC.

ILLUSTRATED BY W. RAINEY, R.I.

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LOSING AND FINDING,

CHAPTER I.

TEMPTATION.

"TIRESOME rain! It always rains when I want to go out."

"Oh, Olive!"

"Well, so it does. I can never do anything I want to do. It *is* a shame!"

The speaker, a little dark-eyed girl of about ten years old, pressed her discontented face against the window-pane, and watched the splashing summer shower with a pout that grew uglier every moment, while behind her lay a whole roomful of games and toys. Even her favourite doll, Rosalind, robed in exquisite embroideries and ribbons of shaded peach, hung disregarded over her arm, its pretty baby-like head, and soft,

real golden hair, on one side, its dimpled, waxen legs, with their lacey socks and pink kid shoes, on the other—limp and forgotten.

"Think how grateful the grass and flowers will be for this beautiful rain," said her governess, "and the poor little thirsty frogs in the shrubbery; and how green and sweet-smelling everything will be when the sun shines again."

Olive stuck out those red lips of hers, that ought to have been so pretty, till they were level with the tip of her nose, but made no reply.

"Why don't you rearrange your doll's house?" asked Mademoiselle. "I see that the new sofa is lying across the baby's cradle, and the frying-pan is on the drawing-room table."

"Don't want to."

"There is your clockwork donkey in the corner—why not give Rosalind a ride on it?"

"It's a stupid old thing, only fit for a baby."

"Shall we have a game at Halma?" the patient governess suggested next.

"There's no fun in that. You always win. I don't care to do anything," concluded Olive, "I want to go out."

"The only thing just now that you cannot do," said Mademoiselle; "I'm afraid you are in a rather perverse mood."

Olive twisted her shoulders.

"I shall go to grandma," was her next remark.

"She may be busy," the governess hinted.

"She won't be disagreeable, anyhow," said Olive.

Grandmamma, this spoiled pet's nearest living relative, was in her dressing-room, reading. Olive found her, and with an air of deep injury poured out her complaint.

"Where were you going, love, had it been fine?" asked the lady, sympathetically.

"To Ashleaf Farm, to see the glass beehives."

"Poor child, it is a disappointment for you! But I don't know what we can do to amuse you, dear, to make up."

"I know what I wish you would do, grandma," said Olive, brightening with a sudden inspiration. "I'm *dreadfully* sorry at not seeing the beehives; but if you will do what I am thinking of, I shall hardly mind about them the least bit."

Mrs. Causton closed her book.

"What is it, love?" she asked, with an indulgent smile that already spoke consent.

Olive came very close to grandma, and clasping two soft arms round her neck, whispered coaxingly, "Show me all your jewels!"

Then she stood off a little way, looking very pretty as she waited for the bestowal of the boon which she felt almost sure would be granted. Her eyes had grown bright and eager, her lips smiled pleasantly, and a most kissable dimple was peeping in her cheek. What a difference it made!

"Show you my jewels, eh?" said Mrs. Causton. "But you have seen them, darling, every one. I have had nothing fresh since my sapphires were re-set."

"But I'd like to see them again," returned Olive. "I do like looking at them so!"

"Well, well, it is a very simple thing to please you, child. Ring for Watkins, then, and she will bring them out."

Olive obeyed with alacrity, and two minutes later the maid, at Mrs. Causton's desire, had placed two elegant leather-covered cases on a small table at her side. Poor, uncomplaining Rosalind was flung carelessly upon a couch, and her owner stationed herself, full of glad expectation, at grandmamma's elbow.

"You'll let me have them in my own hands, won't you?" she begged, as the tiny key went "click" in the hidden lock. "*O-O-oh!*"

This was when the lid was opened, and the sparkling treasures lay revealed upon their velvet bed; and during the next quarter of an hour Olive's conversation was largely composed of similar interjections, longer drawn or shorter, according to the amount of admiration which each article called forth. A pair of neat gold bracelets had rather less breath expended upon them than anything else, but a whole line of *O's* would hardly express the almost awe-stricken delight with which she gazed upon the necklace of diamonds and sapphires that Mrs. Causton spread out upon her knee.

"Oh, dear," she sighed, "what a quantity of lovely things you have! And I haven't anything—not one single thing, except my string of pearls; and those you will scarcely ever let me wear."

"Little girls do not require jewellery," Mrs. Causton replied. "When you are old enough you will wear ornaments, I have no doubt."

"Oh, what a funny little ring!" cried Olive presently. "Isn't it a *dear*! Just large enough for me, I do believe."

The circlet which called forth this exclamation was both small and quaint. The gem was of a peculiar pale, pearly sheen, like moonbeams lighting up a feathery cloud. It was surrounded with tiny diamonds, as by clustering stars, and the hoop was twisted in the form of a silver cord. But the most curious thing about it was that the centre gem was engraved with the semblance of eyes, nose, and mouth.

"It is funny," repeated Olive, "oh, it *is* funny! It is like the moon, when it is round, and looks down at you, and makes a queer grimace."

"That is called a moonstone," said Mrs. Causton. "I do not think it pretty, but it is a curiosity, and very old. That is why I keep it, but I never put it on."

"How old is it?" asked Olive. "A hundred years?"

"Two hundred, more likely."

"Oh, fancy!" and Olive slipped the little ring on first one and then another of her fingers. "Look, grandma; it is not much too large for my middle finger, and it almost fits my first. Was it made for a little girl?"

"I think not, dear. It originally came from

India, I believe, and the Hindus are smaller people, with much smaller and slimmer hands than we have."

"I do like it," said Olive, longingly; and as she watched the flash of the diamond sparks, and the brightening and clouding gleam of the quaint moon face in the midst of them, she almost forgot all the other treasures, even the diamond and sapphire necklace itself.

Very soon Mrs. Causton was called away by the arrival of a visitor, and Olive was left alone. She wished she had coaxed grandma to lend her that lovely ring. Perhaps she would have said "No," but very likely she might have let her wear it, at least until she went to bed. "It fits me just as if it were made for me," said the little girl to herself, and a covetous feeling, though she did not know it as such, rose up strong in her heart.

Watkins re-entered the room.

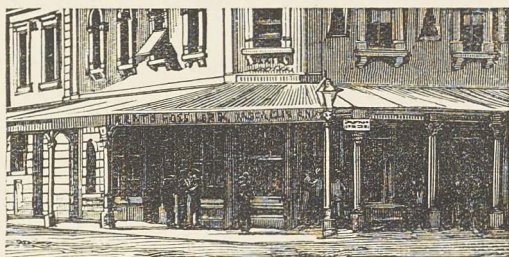
"Your grandma says the jewels must all be put away now, Miss Olive," she said.

Olive's hand slipped behind her—the hand that wore the ring.

"She didn't say this minute," the child objected.

"Yes, at once. I met her in the corridor just now."

Olive stood still, and pouted for about twenty seconds, then the temptation conquered, and, sidling past the unsuspecting maid, she ran with her borrowed treasure away to the nursery again. She *could* not give it up!



CHAPTER II.

HIS ONLY CHANCE.

EVERYONE who knows the busy town of Alderford, doubtless is familiar with that neat little Berlin wool and fancy repository which stands at the corner of Emmet Street, hard by the railway station and facing the church.

The window is always so tastefully set out. Yarns of every description, and of rainbow shades, lie piled at the back, and before them are arranged hooks and pins of bone, wood, or steel, varying in thickness from the size of a slim poker to that of a thick darning-needle ; and these are interspersed with patterns of all kinds, for slippers, antimacassars, and dainty mats, some pieces of work being already temptingly begun. Next comes an assortment of delicately-tinted note paper and envelopes, in cheap five-quire packets, and more expensive ornamental boxes and cabinets. Along with these are a few inkstands, some in polished olive-wood, with spark-

ling cut-glass bottles; others, humbler, are only varnished deal, and, be it noted, do not pretend to be anything else. One section of the window is devoted to toys, and all the small boys of Alderford know where to get the biggest halfpenny whistle, while their sisters are as fully aware that the dear little china dollies at a penny each, which lie in one particular corner, have prettier faces and smarter boots than any other penny dolls in the town.

But the place of honour, the most conspicuous position in the middle of the whole display, is always occupied by a striking selection of fret-work goods, brackets and photo-frames, of course, predominating. Very artistic are these, very cleanly cut and trimly finished, and one or two specimens are almost as fragile as lace. The price, moreover, is moderate, and sales are so frequent that one often sees a change in the stock.

On the particular afternoon of which I write, any one gazing at all these wares at about half-past four might have seen the fair head of a little girl, about twelve years old, hovering over the fret-work goods. She was sitting on the counter within, "minding" the shop. It was very rarely that Winnie Westcott was thus left in charge, but whenever it occurred she always made it part of her business to re-arrange the brackets and frames.

It never seemed to her that they were made as much of as they ought to be. The card-basket,

she thought, would show off better if stood up on its side against the glass screen, and with tender, almost reverent care, she placed it in the new position. The oval frame might go nearer the front of the window, and that would give more room to the beautiful letter-rack that stood behind. So she reached over and effected the desired change of position. She was just considering, with her curly head perked reflectively on one side, whether the "gate" frame looked best with its carved doors open or shut, when a boy, red with laughter and running, burst into the shop, stumbling over a toy wheelbarrow, and upsetting a basket of gaily-painted balls as he came.

"Touched you last!" he shouted triumphantly to some one outside, then slammed the door with a force that set the bell jingling, and "made a face" over the row of picture-books that lined the glass.

"Oh, Lal! look what you've done!" cried Winnie, reprovingly, as she carefully replaced the frame and jumped down from her perch. "How clumsy you are!"

"Never mind — pick 'em up in two-twos," answered the boy, capturing the truant balls with surprising promptitude and tossing them back in the basket. "Is tea ready? Have they come home?"

"The train isn't in yet. It isn't due for another five minutes. Oh, I say, Lal, just look here — you've grazed the paint on the side of this wheel-

barrow! Now mother will have to take something off the price."

Winnie looked very rueful as she showed the disfiguring mark, and as Lal's jolly face lengthened likewise, one could see the strong resemblance between them, albeit the boy's cheeks were the rounder, and his corkscrew locks the browner of the two.

"I shall give mother the difference," he said, "and then it'll be all right. Are they sure to come by the four thirty-five train?" he added.

"Mother said she should if she possibly could. They would be able to do it very well, she thought, if they did not have to wait long to see the doctor. But there might be a good many people there before them, you know."

"I shall go and meet them," announced Lal, to whom keeping quiet for more than three consecutive minutes was an impossibility.

"I'll tell you what I wish you *would* do," said Winnie, pulling out her worn little purse. "Mrs. Brooks, who was in here just now, says that Spackmans have got splendid shrimps to-day, pink ones—as big almost as prawns. Henry is so fond of pink shrimps; I dare say he might make quite a good tea if he had some, particularly if they came as a surprise. Ask them if they will make you a pen'orth, Lal, there's a dear!"

"How many do you expect for a penny?" asked the boy, rather contemptuously. "Two and a tail?"

"There's sure to be enough for Henry, anyhow," his sister answered. "And that's all the money I've got. Run on, now, there's a good boy, and I'll go and see if the kettle boils."

Lal—otherwise Lionel—disappeared, and Winnie withdrew into the cosy little parlour behind the shop to get tea ready.

Deftly she set the table, laying on it a cloth as white as snow and almost as smooth as satin—the arrangements of Mrs. Westcott's simple household were always exquisitely *nice*. Then she brought out a black-and-gold tray, a brown-and-gold teapot, and four white-and-gold cups and saucers, pausing ever and anon to glance with anxious and even troubled face through the chink of the drawn-back window muslin at the shop-door beyond.

"I do hope they will be able to come by this train," she murmured. "He'll be quite knocked up if they don't."

It was while Winnie went to fetch the butter from the pantry that the warning bell jangled once again, and brought her running back.

Lal had returned, in company with a pleasant-looking widow, who had "mother" written plainly all over her kindly, but careworn countenance, and a slender youth of about seventeen, whose thoughtful face, pale now with fatigue, and crowned with thick waves of nut-coloured hair, was like a more delicate copy of either of the other two.

"Have you got them?" whispered Winnie to

Lal, after she had hugged both the travellers in genuine joy at their safe return.

Lal pulled a small brown paper bag out of his pocket, and his sister quietly emptied the contents into a little glass dish and set them before the invalid.

The tone of interest and pleased surprise with which he exclaimed "Oh! shrimps, eh?" was to Winnie an ample reward. And when he added "What fine fellows they are!" her satisfaction was complete.

Then she slipped upstairs after her mother, who had gone to remove her bonnet in an upper room.

"Did you see the doctor?" she eagerly questioned.

"Yes. And we had not very long to wait," answered the widow. "Such a nice gentleman, Winnie, and so kind."

"What did he say?"

Mrs. Westcott paused a few moments before replying; perhaps it was because she had a little difficulty in buttoning her black alpaca apron. Then she said,—

"There is no immediate danger."

"'Immediate'!" echoed Winnie. "Then there *is* danger. Oh, mother, didn't he give you any medicine, or tell you what to do?"

"He said Henry can't do better than go on with the cod-liver oil, and have all the nourishing food he can take. This is not a case for drugs, he said."

"Is that all he told you?" queried the little girl, in a tone of disappointment. "Not much for a guinea!"

"He recommends a sea voyage," added Mrs. Westcott.

"A sea voyage!" cried Winnie, with opening eyes. "Would that do him good?"

"It is his only chance!"

The words had slipped out huskily before Mrs. Westcott was aware. The next instant she was blaming herself for not being more guarded.

"But, mother—oh, mother, can we afford it?"

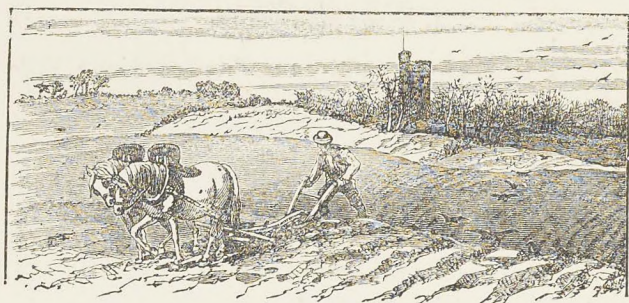
"My dear child, it is useless to dream of such a thing for a moment," the widow said, with keen pain thrilling through the calmness of her tone.

"It is utterly beyond our power."

Very tremulous grew Winnie's grieved lips, and the tears rushed into her grave grey eyes.

"Oh, mother!" she wailed, in a voice that rang in the widow's ears for many days and nights that followed. "And it is *his only chance!*"





CHAPTER III.

LOST!

THE rain was over and gone, and the rich gold of the evening sunshine lit up with a thousand gems the dripping trees and freshened grass. Olive, standing by a window, held up her hand in the full blaze of brightness, to watch the diamond setting of the jewel on her finger flash with crimson, violet, green, and amber fire. For she was alone.

She quite started when the voice of her governess at the open door said cheerfully,—

“I think we might drive to Ashleaf Farm and back, now, before dusk, Olive. See how beautifully fine it is! Go and ask nurse to get you ready.”

Slowly and dreamily, still lost in contemplation of her treasure, the little girl obeyed. She did not care much now whether she saw the beehives or not. Her changeful little mind was wholly taken up with the moonstone ring.

"Ask nurse to put on your grey cloth jacket," added Mademoiselle. "The air is likely to be fresh after the rain."

It did not take long to prepare Olive for going out. She earnestly protested that neither face nor hands required washing, and while her hair was being brushed she kept her jewelled finger carefully out of sight.

She found her gloves and put them on before either her coat or hat were brought out of the wardrobe. Nurse could not understand this singular attack of self-helpfulness: for she often said "Miss Olive would not eat her own dinner herself, I verily believe, if she could have me do it for her!" Strangely uneasy would that good woman have been could she have guessed the cause.

The sweetness and pleasantness of that evening, clear and golden as it was, should have been enough to make up for any inconvenience occasioned by the wet afternoon that went before.

Mademoiselle reminded Olive how much nicer was now a drive along the damp brown roads, between green hedges, sparkling with diamond drops, than the same trip would have been if no rain had fallen. For then the trees and grass would have been all white with dust, and clouds of it would have whirled chokingly around them all the way.

But Olive never cared to be shown the foolishness and unreasonableness—not to mention the downright sinfulness—of her own complaining tempers. Surrounded by every pleasant or pretty

thing that love could think of and money buy for her enjoyment, she felt, at the smallest unavoidable crossing of her own will, that she was the most ill-used little girl in the world !

However, she did not pout, as usual, at her governess' sensible remarks, for she was just then straining her eyes to discern some object slowly approaching them upon the road.

It was the figure of a boy trudging heavily along in the mud. He was coarsely dressed, but his slouched felt hat had a feather in the side, and a gay crimson kerchief was knotted round his throat. He was bent as he walked beneath the weight of the barrel-organ he carried on his back, and on his arm was perched the tiny jacket and skirt, and comical little head of a very small monkey.

"Here comes an Italian boy!" exclaimed Olive beaming with delight. "And such a *sweet* little monkey! Oh, Mademoiselle, do just turn your head and look. It is such a *mile*!"

"I shall see quite enough of the creature's sweetness as they pass us, Olive, thank you!" replied Mademoiselle with a languid smile.

"I shall not let them pass. I shall stop them," Olive announced. "I have not seen a performing monkey for *years*. Please ask Williams to wait just here."

The carriage was brought to a standstill, and the boy, shrewdly observing his chance, hurried forward, his eyes sparkling and teeth gleaming with smiles.

Without a moment's loss of time the organ was slung into position, the monkey hopped dutifully to its master's shoulder, and the "music" began.

Such music! A cracked jingling and jangling of sharps, flats, and naturals, all out of tune. A worn-out barrel-organ seems, indeed, to be the acknowledged accompaniment of a performing monkey, for they are rarely found apart.

The governess laughed, wrinkled her brows, and covered her ears, but Olive was watching the antics of the queer little animal with absorbing interest.

How nimbly Jacko skipped and popped about to be sure! The wee velvet jacket and gay checked skirt seemed here, there and everywhere at once. Round and round he ran, at the length of his string—up his master's arm, and perching on his head, then down again in a twinkling, and the next instant, to Olive's delight, the funny little cunning face peered down upon her from the coachman's seat. Then he took off his smart cap, and made a beautiful bow.

"I must give him some money, into his own tiny hand," she said. And pulling off her silk glove, she began to fumble for her little seal-skin purse.

As the beehives had been eclipsed in interest by the moonstone ring, so the ring in its turn, great as had been its fascination, was now actually forgotten as Olive watched the monkey.

"Where can my purse be?" she asked, feeling

first in the pocket of her frock, and then in no less than five smaller pockets, with which the inside and outside of her jacket were furnished. "I must have left it at home. Will you lend me something, Mademoiselle, please?"

"Certainly, my love," replied the governess, at once producing her *portmonnaie*.

And the next minute Jacko's bird-claw of a hand snatched a silver shilling from Olive's pink fingers, while his master's brown face and great black eyes beamed with gratitude.

"It is too late now to go as far as Ashleaf Farm," said Mademoiselle, as the boy and monkey, both bowing and scraping extravagantly, bade their patrons "adieu!" "We will just take a turn on the Alderford Road, and then go home."

"But I'm glad we saw the monkey, aren't you?" said Olive, still radiant with pleasure. "Wasn't it a darling pet? I shall ask grandma to buy one just like that for me. And I shall have it to sit beside me at meals, and sleep in a little cradle by my bed."

Mademoiselle almost gasped with horror at this proposal, but forbore, trusting that even Mrs. Causton's indulgence would draw a line here.

Olive chattered of the monkey and its doings, its prettiness and "sweetness," all the way home.

In the hall, as they entered, the pair encountered the lady of the house herself, just going in to dinner.

"Oh, grandma!" cried the child, eagerly, "I

want you to buy me a *dear* little monkey, and let Watkins make him a velvet coat and a scarlet frock. And I want him to—”

“My dearest Olive, what will you desire next?” laughed her grandmother, carelessly. “Dear, dear, how odiously that jacket fits, Mademoiselle,” she added, with a dissatisfied glance at the child’s attire; “it is far too large for Olive’s slight figure. Tell nurse I do not wish to see it again.”

So saying, Mrs. Causton swept into the dining-room, and Olive, silenced by the unfavourable air with which her request was received, walked slowly and quietly up the broad staircase to her own apartments.

On the threshold of the nursery she suddenly paused, pulled off both gloves, and gazed in blank dismay at her *bare* hands. Then she shook the gloves, and shook her skirt, and, leaning over the balustrade, looked vaguely down the stairs and into the hall below.

“What *shall* I do?” she murmured, half aloud. “What *will* grandma say?”

“What is the matter, my dear?” asked nurse, coming out upon the landing at the sound of her charge’s voice. “Have you hurt yourself?”

“No,” answered Olive, gravely; “but I’ve lost grandma’s ring.”

“Which ring?”

“Her little moonstone ring. I—I had it on. I forgot all about it till this moment. I’m afraid I lost it out of doors.”

"A *moonstone* ring, did you say, my dear?" asked the nurse, all the colour fading out of her fresh-complexioned face.

"Yes, and grandma didn't know I had it," said Olive, in great concern. "Do you think she will be *very* angry, nursie? Oh, nurse, how strange you look!"

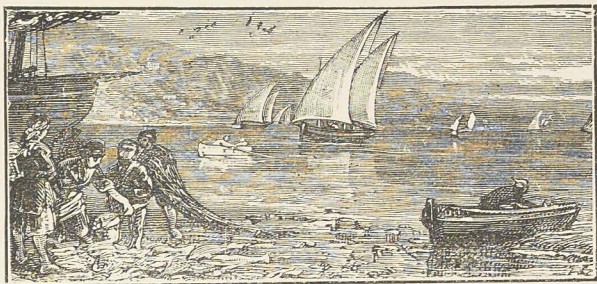
"Oh, Miss Olive—oh, my darling, don't, *don't* say that you've lost the moonstone ring!" cried Nurse Barlow, almost crying. "Oh, my dear, the thought of it turns my blood. You must find it again, Miss Olive, indeed you must!"

"I will if I can, of course, nurse. We must ask Williams to look well in the carriage, and shake all the rugs. But you needn't seem so dreadfully frightened," the child added in a tone of remonstrance, and disengaging herself from the nurse's almost convulsive clasp. "Any one would think grandma was going to kill me for it. I don't believe she will say very much, after all."

"Ah!" groaned Mrs. Barlow. "You little know!"

Then, as she turned away, she muttered, though not meaning her words for Olive's quick ears, "She might almost as well kill the child at once, as let her make a plaything of that hateful ring!"





CHAPTER IV.

“GOD CAN !”

ABOUT a week after the visit of Mrs. Westcott and Henry to the London physician, Winifred was sitting one evening in the shop-parlour playing chess with the invalid. She had taught herself the game from a book, so that she might be able to entertain him, yet without giving him the trouble of teaching her. The one great passion of Winnie's life was devotion to her ailing elder brother.

They all loved him. Indeed, no one could look into Henry Westcott's fair, refined face, with its deep, thoughtful eyes and mouth as sweet as a girl's, without feeling their heart go out towards him. In manner too, the lad was gifted with a rare, winning grace, that matched well his slender, but straight-grown form. “Such a superior air,” folks said he had. “If he had

been a nobleman's son, he could not be more of a gentleman."

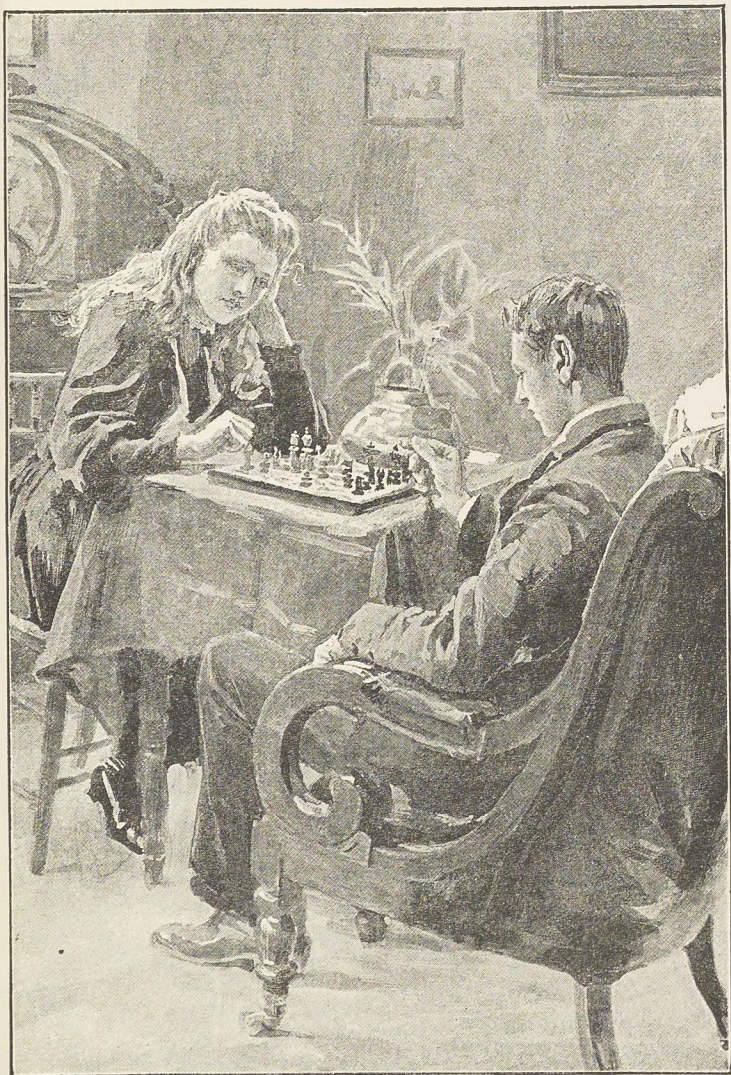
"A fine mind, a very fine mind," his schoolmaster observed. "And plenty of spirit. If only he can tide over the trying years before one-and-twenty, he will make a splendid man."

"And he is such a dear, good lad," his mother said. "That is best of all."

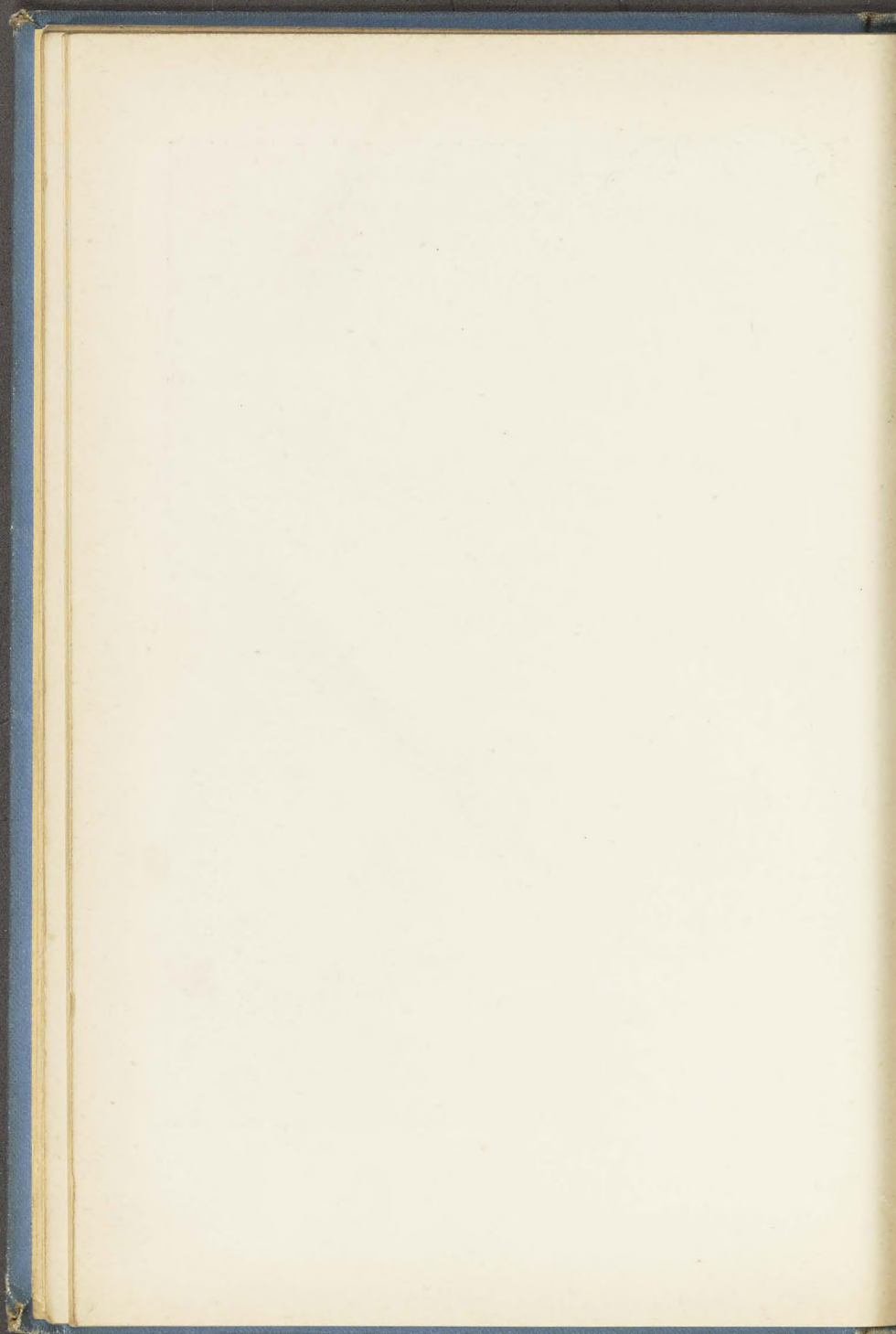
How Winnie treasured up all these sayings in her memory, bringing them out sometimes to look at like very precious things! They had once been a pure joy to her, but they were not all joy now. She was thinking of them as she sat waiting for Henry to decide on a place of safety for his threatened queen. So sharp and white was that delicate profile, so purple-shadowed the large eyes, so worn the temples beneath those waving locks of brown. Then the chequered board began to dance before her blurring gaze, and the little men of red and white became hopelessly mixed up. Henry was doomed—the great doctor had said so. Henry was going to die!

With a rush of agony that her childish breast could scarce contain bursting upwards to her throat, Winnie sat still and stared hard at the table she could not see, not daring to move or blink an eyelash lest the brimming tears should overflow, and Henry be grieved.

She did not hear the stopping of wheels outside the door, and if she heard, she did not heed the tinkling shop-bell. It was when Lal burst in like



"WINIFRED WAS PLAYING CHESS WITH THE INVALID." [p. 27.]



a whirlwind that she turned round and surreptitiously wiped her eyes with the back of her hand.

"Here's something come for you, Win!" he cried, his fresh, joyous voice sounding almost harshly in her ears. "It has come by the carrier. Something big; look!"

He held aloft a brown paper parcel as he spoke.

"I fancy it is from Auntie Kate," said their mother, who followed him.

"Let's cut the string," said Henry, "and see what it is."

The wrappers on being opened revealed to view, first a letter, addressed to Mrs. Westcott, which was lying on the top, and then, neatly folded, a little out-door jacket of fine grey cloth, with pretty, smoked-pearl buttons.

"Oh, look, mother!" Winnie exclaimed. "Isn't it nice? And has auntie sent it for me?"

"Yes," answered Mrs. Westcott, who was rapidly scanning the letter. "Auntie's friend, Mrs. Barlow, who, you know, is nurse to the Hon. Mrs. Causton's little grand-daughter, gave it to auntie, thinking it might be big enough for your cousin Grace, but it is far too tight. She thought, she says, that as you are much thinner than Grace, it might perhaps fit you."

"It was kind of her to think of me, wasn't it?" said Winnie, who could not but be very pleased with such a present. "What a beauty it is! The cloth is as smooth as satin, and the fronts are lined with silk to match. Oh, and every bit of it is

stitched with silk, and the seams inside are all bound with narrow ribbon. It *is* lovely!"

"Put it on," suggested Lal, "and let's see how it looks."

Nothing loth, Winnie did so. In the back and shoulders the jacket sat to her slender little figure as though made for her, but Mrs. Westcott said that the buttons must be slightly altered to give more room in the chest.

"It will be just the thing for you to take with you to Cloverdale," she added, "to wear on cool evenings and chilly days."

Winnie looked up quickly, and her lips parted as if to speak, but she said nothing.

"Well, you do look a swell, just!" was Lal's comment, as he gazed at his pretty sister in undisguised admiration. "Young Miss What's-her-name herself couldn't out-do you!"

Henry did not say much, but his eyes were full of tender pleasure, and he stroked Winnie's arm down with a caressing touch that was dearer to her than all Lionel's outspoken praise.

Later in the evening, when the shop was shut, Mrs. Westcott and Winnie found themselves alone together.

"Mother," began the girl, earnestly, "I *don't* want to go to Cloverdale!"

"But I think the change will do you good dear," replied her mother. "You have been looking not at all the thing, lately. And it is so kind

of Mrs. Carr to ask you; and Cloverdale is such a pretty place."

"Yes," said Winnie, "but—oh, mother, *you know!*"

And flinging her arms around her mother's waist, Winnie laid her face upon her shoulder.

"Know what, dearie?"

"Why I don't want to go to Cloverdale."

"Is it because of Henry?" asked Mrs. Westcott, gently, with her lips on Winnie's brow.

"I can't bear to leave him!" said Winnie, chokingly.

"But Dr. Dursley said there was no immediate danger."

"Yes. But—but—oh, mother, don't you understand? I feel I grudge every minute of the time. And to go away for three weeks!"

Mrs. Westcott could not utter a word.

"Mother!" said Winnie, suddenly raising her head, "did Dr. Dursley say *how long?* Did he tell you? Oh, do, do tell me! I would rather know."

"He said," answered the widow, slowly, "that it might be some months, or even a year. Not more."

"Does Henry know?"

"Yes."

"And nothing can save him but a sea voyage?"

"Humanly speaking, nothing."

Again there was silence. Then once more

Winnie lifted her head. This time the eyes were very bright that shone through her tears.

"Mother," she said, firmly, "*God can!*"

"He can," Mrs. Westcott assented. "But it may not be His will."

"I shall pray," said Winnie, "and keep on. He knows we can't send Henry over the sea. And He can cure him without it."

"We must not expect a miracle to be performed in these days, my dear," returned the widow, sadly.

"Never mind," persisted Winnie. "God can do it, and I shall pray."





CHAPTER V.

AT BROADMEAD FARM.

WINNIE WESTCOTT was an obedient child, and in the end she yielded to her mother's wish, and started on her visit to Cloverdale. Her only stipulation was for a fortnight's absence, instead of three weeks. And to this her mother consented, thinking that once at home with the kind folks at the farm-house, she would be willing enough to stay.

But the secret of Winnie's cheerful leave-taking, her even smiling farewell to Henry, with only a little tremble of the lip, was her firm faith that God would spare her precious brother's life, and make him well, for she had prayed.

Thus, not sadly, but full of hope, she found herself being whirled across sun-flooded meadows, over bridges, and through deep cuttings whose steep green sides were spangled with white, and pink, and yellow flowers; every moment farther

from home and Henry, nearer to Broadmead Farm and kindly Mrs. Carr.

Winnie, who had never been to Cloverdale before, had never seen the farm. She had not, as we know, looked forward with much pleasure to this visit, and consequently had not exhausted her imagination in picturing what the house and its surroundings might be like. It burst upon her, therefore, with all the freshness of an unexpected delight; and to the town-bred child, Broadmead Farm seemed very beautiful indeed.

The low-built, roomy homestead nestled at the foot of a wooded slope, and before it stretched the fair, *broad meads* from which it must have gained its name. Behind rose the hill, crowned with grand old trees—spreading beeches, whose crisp, fallen leaves bronzed the moss carpet beneath them, and whose giant branches cast flickering shadows on a pretty yellow road that cut its picturesque way through the gently rising ground. Such a spot for a picnic!

Meek-faced cows lay peacefully in the meadows, chewing the cud, or grazed in the neighbouring forest glades to the silvery tinkle of the bells about their necks. Clean, pinky pigs routed contentedly beneath the beeches, and ducks, as white as snow, sunned themselves on grass as green as emerald. The sweet scent of hay, and roses, and new milk was always in the air out of doors, while the farmhouse kitchen seemed as perpetually to smell of savoury pies and freshly baked bread,

Good Mrs. Carr, the presiding genius of the place, was quite in keeping with the air of comfort and thrifty abundance by which she was surrounded — stout, rosy, and cheery-looking, in a clean gingham gown, and a spotless apron with a bib. Her manner was so motherly and kind that Winnie felt at home with her at once, and before it was time to make the acquaintance of the pretty white bed in the quaint, gabled attic that had been prepared for her, had told her hostess all about the shop, and what they sold in it, and Lal and his pranks, and Henry, his goodness, his cleverness, the beautiful fretwork things he could make, and his sad health. Into all of which Mrs. Carr entered with the greatest interest and sympathy.

Concerning the sea voyage that the invalid could not have, the little girl, however, said not a word, for she felt, with instinctive delicacy, that her mother might not like this part of their family affairs to be known.

Of all that Winnie saw in and about the farm on the evening of her arrival, nothing took her fancy more than a verandah, running along the south side of the house, and upon which the sitting-room opened with a glass double door. A beautiful, broad-leaved vine covered the verandah with its masses of verdant foliage, and in this cool, green shade were a charming little rustic table and two or three chairs to match. Mrs. Carr said that in the hottest afternoons they often had tea out here, and Winnie immediately hoped that the

weather during her stay at the farm might be "broiling and baking and frying" to a degree unknown in that locality before.

Imagine her dismay, therefore, when, on entering the sitting-room during the forenoon of the following day, she saw Mr. Carr mounted on a step-ladder chopping away at the lovely vine with a pair of shears, while wreath after wreath, spray after spray, all fresh and luxuriant as they were, fell beneath the cruel steel to add to the green ruin that already almost covered the verandah floor.

"Oh! oh, what a shame!"

The words had leaped from Winnie's lips without a thought, and before she noticed that her hostess was not alone. When a strange voice from a dusky corner of the room said gently, "Yes, it *does* seem sad!" she started in confusion, and saw that a lady was seated on the sofa, opposite to Mrs. Carr.

"Here is a young friend of mine, Winnie Westcott, from Alderford," said the farmer's wife, drawing the blushing child towards them. "This lady is Mrs. Smythe, Winnie, our good minister's wife."

"So you don't like to see the pruning of the vine, dear?" remarked the lady, smiling.

"It seems dreadful to cut all the beautiful leaves away like that!" Winnie answered.

"Ah, but they were keeping the sunshine from the little bunches of grapes, and sucking away the

strength and nourishment that is wanted to go and help make the fruit round and large and full of juice."

"I didn't know there were any grapes on it," said Winnie, with town-bred simplicity.

"No, it was nearly dark when you looked last night," replied Mrs. Carr, "and many of them, besides, were hidden by the leaves. Go out now and see what a splendid lot of fruit we are going to have."

Winnie did so, and was amazed at the number of tiny green bunches of grapes the clipping had brought to view. She tried to count them, but failed. Yet it was sad to see how stripped and bare the poor vine was getting to look beneath those remorseless shears. It was like Henry when he had been to have his hair cut!

As she stood watching, and gathering up here and there a fallen spray in her pitiful hands, she heard Mrs. Smythe say, softly, "'Every branch that beareth fruit, He purgeth it, that it may bring forth more fruit.'"

"Yes," responded Mrs. Carr, with a sigh, "and we need to remember the wherefore of it all, when we see how good people are troubled and tried."

"Indeed we do," said the visitor. "It looks as dreadful to us for lovely Christian characters to be visited with sickness and bereavement and worldly losses, as it seemed to your little friend there that the vine should be pruned."

Here Winnie began to pay attention, for she

could not but think of her dear sick brother at home, and all he had to suffer, and how sad it was for his friends to see.

"It is a good thing we can't always have our own way," said the farmer's wife, "or we should often spare the pruning, and spoil the fruit. We do beg off very hard sometimes, don't we? Thank God, He always sends His children what is the very best for them, in spite of themselves."

Winnie stood amazed. What strange talk was this? Henry was one of God's children if ever anybody was—she felt sure of that. But how could it be "the very best" for him to be ill? And how could the trouble after trouble that was coming upon her dear mother be "the very best" for her? Winnie had yet to learn that the love of God, like that of a wise parent, is sometimes shown in the teaching of hard lessons, or the giving of a bitter draught.

She had entreated her mother and Lal to be sure and let her know how Henry was. She hoped to hear that he had already begun to get better, but letter after letter—and from Lionel, though short, they came pretty frequently—contained only the brief and unsatisfying message that he was "about the same." Henry's own correspondence, full of pleasant chat about things at home, said never a word concerning himself. But Winnie would not yet feel discouraged, though she thought often of the vine, and the strange things Mrs. Carr and her friend had said.

Nevertheless, she enjoyed her visit far more than she had expected. She could not help it, with so much to interest and amuse. There were the horses, calves and pigs, the turkeys, the chickens, and the dearest little fluffy yellow ducks ; there were flowers in the garden and fruit in the orchard, there were delightful walks and drives out of doors, and scarcely less delightful pastry-making in the farm kitchen, when Winnie had out Mrs. Carr's patty-pans and cutters, and made charming little open tartlets, with jam inside, and figures of birds, leaves or stars on the top. Above all, there had already, twice in one week, been packed a small hamper of good things to send Henry. One time there was a chicken, and a pound of delicious butter, and some apples ; the other time there was a quantity of luscious raspberries and red currants, with a pot of cream.

When Winnie had been at the farm about ten days, a postscript to one of her mother's letters ran thus : "Have you seen to the buttons on that grey jacket, yet ? You know I had not time to do so before you went away. If you have not, do so at once, for the evenings are getting chilly, and you will want it to wear."

Winnie had been so busy, and so fully taken up with all her new amusements at the farm, that her aunt's welcome present had actually slipped quite into the background of her mind and been forgotten, as also her mother's injunction concerning it. So, that the jacket might be sure to be ready

when required, she sat down with her needle and thread that same forenoon to effect the needed alteration. Mrs. Carr was out, having gone to the neighbouring market town on business.

Very carefully Winnie cut the pretty pearl buttons off, very deftly and strongly she sewed them on again. Then she tried on the jacket, fastening it tightly round her slim little figure to see the effect in the glass. This was highly satisfactory to her, especially when she bowed elaborately to her own reflection, and said, "How do you do, Miss Westcott? I hope I see you quite well!"

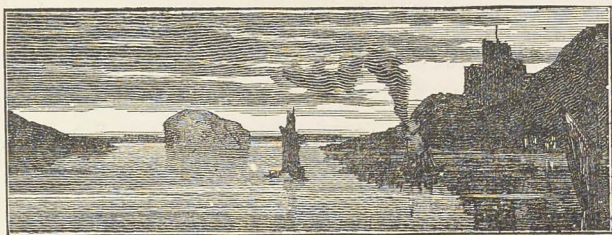
Stroking down the satin-faced cloth admiringly with her hands, she fancied she felt a small, hard lump, sticking, as she thought, in the lining.

She took off the jacket to find out what it could be, and discovered a small inner pocket, so neatly contrived that it had hitherto quite escaped her notice.

In the bottom of this pocket the something lay concealed.

Eagerly Winnie's fingers dived in, and trembling with excitement they came out again, grasping an object round and sparkling and bright—nothing less than the moonstone ring!





CHAPTER VI.

THE LEGEND OF THE RING.

A BED-CHAMBER fit for a princess ! The carpet was of all the richly-blending greens and browns of woodland moss, and as soft as moss itself to the feet. The chairs were covered with cretonne as glossy as satin, creamy in shade, and sprinkled with rosebuds. The wall-paper, too, was ornamented with trailing pink-flowered briars, with a bird's-nest peeping here and there among the leaves, and the toilet-ware was of pink and gold.

The filmy curtains that veiled the broad window were looped with bands of rose-colour, the draperies of the bed were of lace-like texture over a rosy ground, and the pink shade of the lamp cast a softly-flushing glow over the ceiling, and warmed the snowy marble of the wash-stand into flower-like life.

Beneath the rich, silken quilt lay little Olive, her teeth chattering with horror, while a cold perspiration broke from every pore.

She was not dreaming. She had not yet been to sleep since bidding her grandmother "good-night" in the brilliant drawing-room an hour before. What then had plunged her, tenderly cared for as she ever was, into this agony of grief and fear?

A week had elapsed since the disappearance of the moonstone ring. Olive had confessed her fault, and been forgiven. Not one hard word, scarcely one mild reproach had Mrs. Causton uttered; her darling was never chidden, and, but for a naturally pleasant disposition, would certainly have been in consequence a far more disagreeable child than she really was. But the little girl, who was quick and sensitive, noticed the strangely shocked and anxious expression which came over her grandmother's face as she listened to the story of the lost trinket, and she wondered why she was strained so long and closely to the old lady's breast. Nurse had hugged her like that, and looked frightened, too, when *she* heard about it. What could it all mean?

The most careful search, it is needless to say, had been made for the missing jewel, but without result. Every corner of the carriage had been ransacked, since it was evidently at some time during Olive's evening drive that the ring had been lost—it was safe upon her finger when she went out, and on her return it was gone. Every cushion had been removed, every rug shaken. Mrs. Causton had even ordered the lining of the

vehicle to be taken out, in the hope of finding the ring in some out-of-the-way crack, but all in vain.

It was at length decided, on the suggestion of Mademoiselle, that the monkey must have snatched the glittering object from Olive's hand, when she gave it the money. "This would be quite easy, as it was large and loose upon her finger," the governess said, "and they are so cunning and quick."

"It was exceedingly remiss of nurse not to observe that the child was wearing it when she dressed her for going out," Mrs. Causton replied. "The intrinsic value of the ring was not great, but there are reasons why I would almost rather have lost any jewel I possess than that."

On the day of which I am now speaking Olive's cousin Reginald, a boy two or three years older than herself, had come, with his mother, to luncheon at Causton Towers.

"I say, Olive, you've done something now, haven't you?" he remarked, in a tone full of meaning, as they went round the grounds together.

"I've only lost that old ring of grandma's," she replied.

"*Only!*"

"Well, I can't see what everybody is making such a fuss about," said Olive, rather fretfully. "Grandma herself says it was not worth very

much. Anybody would think I had done something dreadful !”

“Dreadful or not, I wouldn’t be you, for something,” said Reginald ; “and so I tell you.”

“But *why* ? Nobody will do anything to me. It was only an accident, after all.”

“Do you mean to say you don’t know the legend belonging to that moonstone ring ?” asked Reginald, looking incredulous.

“The legend ? No ! A legend is a sort of story, isn’t it ?” said Olive, her interest fully awake. “Grandma did not tell me any story about it, except that it came from India, and was very old.”

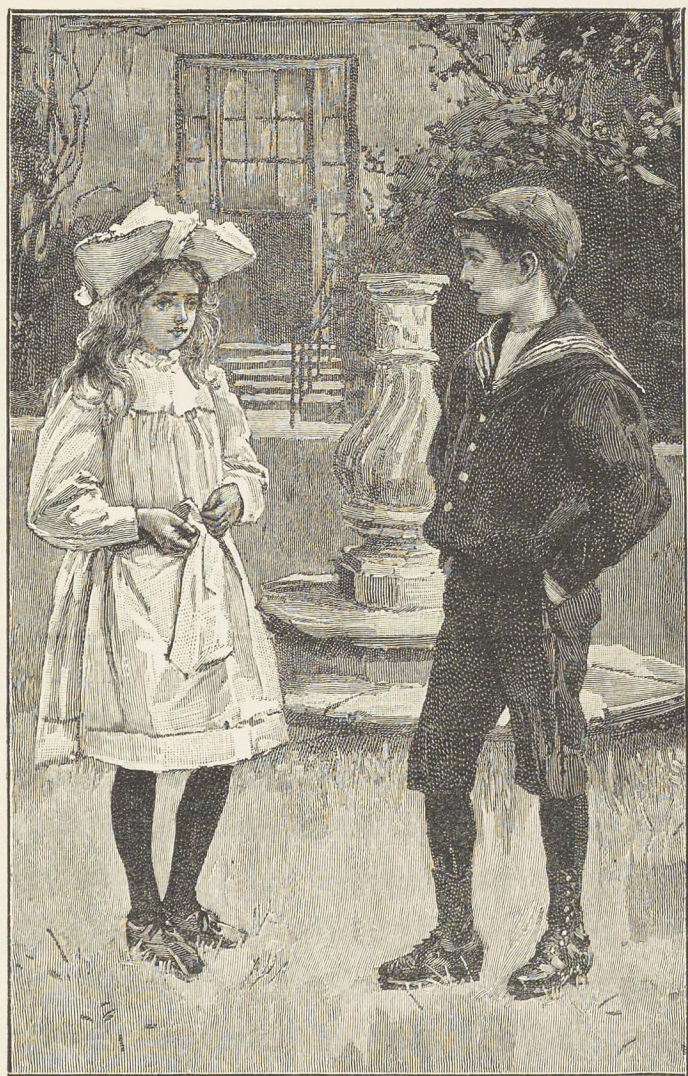
“Ah ! *I’ve* heard a nice tale about it,” said Reggie, with an air of profound knowledge. “Do you mean to say you don’t know that it was given to your great-great-*great*-grandfather by a mysterious Indian princess, who was very fond of him ?”

“No, not a word.”

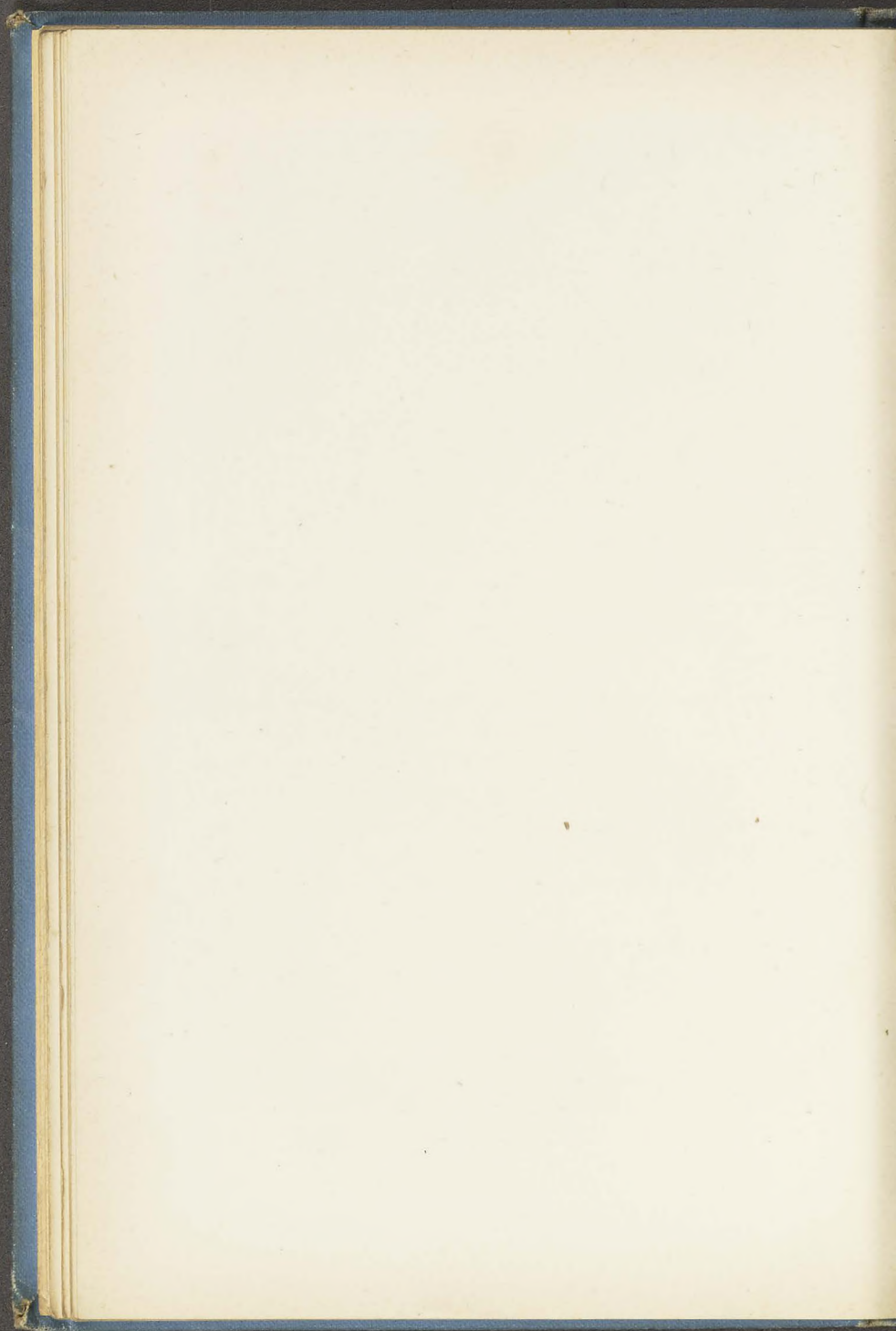
“Well, it was ; and she said that if ever he, or *anybody else* that had it in their keeping, were to lose it, that person, no matter who it was, *would surely die within three months !*”

“It isn’t true !” gasped Olive.

“Ah, but it is, though. Jukes told me, and he knows it for a fact. Because his grandfather was in the family years and years ago, and somebody—grandfather’s brother, I think—*did* lose the ring, and he *did* die, just as the princess said,



“‘I WOULDN’T BE YOU FOR SOMETHING,’ SAID REGINALD.”



though the ring was found again after he was buried."

Poor Olive's face had grown paler and paler, her large eyes darker and more horror-filled at every word Reggie uttered. He did not mean to be cruel—he had no idea of what he was really doing. He liked to feel that he was able to produce so marked an effect, and proceeded to cap the climax by adding,—

"I believe the lady's ghost appears to the person who has lost the ring, at midnight, and makes them drink something out of a ghostly goblet, and that kills them. So you had better look out!"

Poor Olive, alone in her little bed at night! There was no one near to soothe her with thoughts of the good God in whose hand are all our lives; no one to tell her—for she had dared confide the fearful tale to none—on what slight foundation such superstitious stories mostly rest; no one to remind her of the tender Saviour who carries His lambs in His arms even through the valley of the shadow of death, and takes away all their fear.

Poor little girl! No wonder she trembled and cried.





CHAPTER VII.

FOUND AND—LOST.

WINNIE WESTCOTT'S first thought on bringing the hidden ring to the light of day was that it was probably only a toy trinket, such as they sold at a halfpenny and a penny each in the shop at home; yet it needed but a second glance to assure her that, in spite of its rather peculiar appearance, the jewel was something very different from any of those. The beautiful finish of the workmanship and the brilliance of the diamonds were apparent to even her inexperienced eyes, and, forthwith rushing to the other extreme, she vaguely imagined it to be of great value—"perhaps fifty pounds, perhaps a hundred, perhaps even more."

Here was marvellous good fortune; it was just like a fairy-tale, or a dream!

Perhaps it was only a dream. Winnie pinched her arms and pulled her hair to make sure. It

must be a reality ! Here she was, in that queer attic chamber, wide awake, up and dressed, while smooth and orderly lay the white bed at her side. The noonday sun was shining, and the clank of footsteps and pails, with the cackle of hens, rose from the yard below, and commonplace smells of all kinds—cows, hay, pigs, and the cooking of a hot mash for a horse that was sick—came in through the open window. Nay, it was no dream ; it was all solid fact. Winnie had been made a rich girl at one single stroke.

Need I say that no sooner was she assured of the reality of the wonderful thing which had taken place than she thought, "Now Henry can have the sea voyage !" And she felt that her prayers had been answered, and her brother's life saved.

Glowing and throbbing with joy, she longed to rush and tell somebody ; but there was nobody in the house to tell except old Pattie the servant, and she was stone deaf. So she fetched ink and paper, and sat down to write to Henry himself the wonderful news. By to-morrow morning all at home would be as happy as she, for she would walk over to the village and post the letter herself that very afternoon.

She laid the ring on the dressing-table in front of her while she wrote—just where the sunshine could sparkle in the stones—and at about every three words she left off to admire it afresh. But no desire of keeping her "find" for her own pleasure once entered her mind ; that it should be

sold as soon as possible, and Henry sent across the sea, was her first and last thought.

Her *last* thought, did I say? Not quite.

Winnie was about half through with her letter, and was just, rather hesitantly, writing that she felt sure God had sent her the ring—had Himself put it there on purpose for her to find, because she had prayed—when she suddenly paused, in the middle of a word, and a grave look, growing to dismay, stole over her face.

Had God put it there?

Winnie, when she came to consider the matter, did not absolutely suppose that a miracle had been performed on her behalf. The ring must have been placed in the jacket pocket by some human hand. Was it not, probably, the hand of the person to whom the ring belonged, and did not the ring belong to that person still?

It was, doubtless, little Miss Causton's ring, and though it might never be asked for, to keep it, and say nothing, would be *hardly* right.

Winnie felt as though the sun had suddenly gone behind a dark cloud, notwithstanding that the diamonds were flashing in its rays all the time. She laid down her pen, and resting her chin on both her hands, tried to think the matter out.

It seemed dreadfully hard to relinquish the idea that this valuable jewel had been given her expressly that she might be able to procure for her darling brother the means of restoration to health.

Yet God might be displeased if she kept it,

and then—so ran her thoughts—He would be sure not to make Henry well. She must yield it up at once, if it were right to do so; perhaps some one was even now being unjustly suspected of *stealing* it!—if it had been missed.

Slowly, and with tears of bitter disappointment creeping down her cheeks, Winnie was proceeding to tear up the letter so jubilantly begun, which she would now have to replace by another in quite a different strain, when she heard Mrs. Carr's voice below.

She would run down and tell her all, and ask her advice; perhaps she would be able to see some way out of the difficulty, without giving up the ring.

Dinner, however, was just ready; in fact, it had been already waiting some time, as the mistress was late, and now she had not a minute to spare to listen to anything her little guest wanted to say. So Winnie's wonderful news had to be kept a while longer; for, according to the simple custom at the farm, two or three helpers sat down at the table with Mr. and Mrs. Carr, and she did not like to speak of her "find," and discuss her doubts about it before them.

But so long did the meal seem, and so anxious was Winnie to have a reliable opinion on the subject which filled her mind, that she could not help alluding to it in a sideway fashion.

"Suppose anybody finds anything," she began, after gazing absently at her untouched slice of jam pudding for some minutes, "and they don't

know—at least, they are not sure—who it belongs to, may they keep it themselves?”

“Not until they have done all they can to discover the owner,” replied Mr. Carr, promptly.

This was not encouraging.

“But suppose the owner is very rich, and has got heaps and heaps without it; and—”

“That ‘doesn’t matter a bit!’” interrupted the farmer. “Right is right. It is just as much a theft to take one sovereign that doesn’t belong to you from a bag with a thousand in it, as to rob a man of the only penny he has got, though it may not be so base. It’s breaking the eighth commandment, all the same.”

“Anything that is found ought to be placed in the hands of the police, I believe,” said Mrs. Carr, “and they will take charge of it until the owner appears to claim it.”

“But if it was *given* to you, what then?” pursued Winnie.

“That’s a horse of another colour, entirely,” returned the farmer. “I thought you were talking about finding things. When anything is given you, it’s your own, of course. That is,” he added, beginning to suspect a motive behind this earnest questioning, “if it honestly belonged to the person who gave it, and he was at liberty to do as he liked with it.”

“I suppose,” said Winnie, thoughtfully tracing out the pattern on her plate with the prong of a fork—though she could not really have been in

any doubt on so simple a point—"that if they—the person, I mean—don't know that they have given it, it is just the same as if they hadn't!"

"You seem to be getting us into a bit of a fog, my lass," commented Mr. Carr, laughing good-humouredly. "I'm off now. I must leave you and the missus to hammer it out between you."

"What is it, Winnie?" asked Mrs. Carr, when all had left the table, and she and her young visitor found themselves alone. "Have you been finding anything, child?"

"Yes, ma'am," answered Winnie, with beating heart. "In the pocket of that jacket I told you had belonged to a young lady, I found a ring!"

"A ring!" exclaimed the farmer's wife, in surprise.

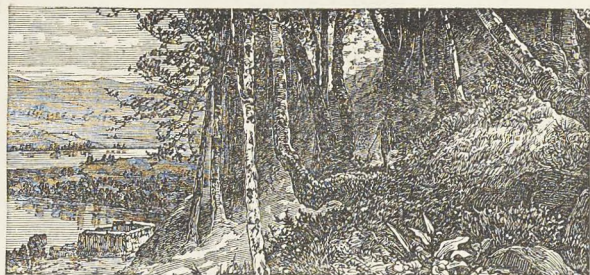
"Yes; a real beauty. All diamonds, and lovely. I'll show it to you!"

And Winnie flew up the stairs two steps at a time to her little room in the roof.

The sunshine had passed along the wall, and no more lighted up the jewelled circlet like a spark of fire. But Winnie went straight across to the dressing-table where she had left it; then she stood still in sudden, blank dismay.

The pen and ink were there, and the unfinished letter, and the tiny looking-glass, and the fat, crochet-covered pincushion; and the needle and cotton she had been sewing with, just as she had laid them down.

But the ring was gone!



CHAPTER VIII.

OLIVE'S TROUBLE.

"I CANNOT think what is the matter with Olive," said Mrs. Causton, anxiously. "During these last few days she has grown so pale, and there are dark circles round her eyes. Have you not noticed it, Mademoiselle?"

"Indeed I have," replied the governess. "Her appetite has been so bad, and she seems strangely low-spirited and nervous."

"I am getting quite concerned about the child," continued her grandmother. "She has always been a sensitive, delicate little creature, but until now her general health has been fairly good. I think I shall send a note to Dr. Keen, and ask him to come and look at her."

For nearly a week Olive had been keeping her dreadful secret to herself. She did not feel that she *could* speak of it to anybody. She fancied that perhaps her grandmother did not know of the legend, and there was enough unselfishness in her

nature, little as it had been cultivated, to make her unwilling to frighten anyone she loved. So night after night she lay in bed shaking with fear, the coverings pulled over her head to the verge of suffocation, until her misery was partially forgotten in an uneasy, dream-haunted sleep.

Small wonder, then, that the child looked white and wretched in the day-time, and could neither eat, nor learn, nor play with any of her former zest. She was really ill, and she knew it, and this only added to her terror; for although no ghostly apparition had yet disturbed her, she thought her sickly feelings were a sure sign that what Reginald had said would come true—within three months she would die.

"Are you unhappy about anything, Olive, pet?" asked her grandmother, as she fondled her one day. "I cannot bear to see you look like this. Can't you tell grannie what is the matter?"

Olive made no answer, but began to cry.

"Has anybody been saying anything to worry you, love?" pursued Mrs. Causton, beginning to suspect the truth, yet careful not to arouse the child's curiosity if she were still ignorant of the superstition concerning the ring.

As she kissed and caressed Olive, it flashed suddenly into the little girl's mind that perhaps the reason why both grandma and nurse hugged her, and seemed so much distressed when she told them of her loss, was just that they knew what would happen to her in consequence.

"Grandma," she said, in an awe-filled whisper, "do *you* know the legend of the ring?"

"I know there is some foolish tale connected with it," answered Mrs. Causton. "Who told you, Olive?"

"Reggie did. Grandma, is it *true*?"

"It was very wrong of Reggie—very wrong indeed," was the reply. "It was wicked and unkind. He is old enough to know better than to upset your nerves like this, poor darling!"

"It *isn't* true, is it?" persisted Olive, her great dark eyes fixed searchingly on Mrs. Causton's face, and hungering for a denial.

"Of course not," answered grandmamma, yet somehow not assuringly. Then she immediately reverted to Reginald, and his bad behaviour to his little cousin. "So naughty of him, so very naughty! So unmanly; so unkind. I am exceedingly annoyed with Reginald, and so I shall let him understand."

All of which was very proper and quite the truth. But Olive would far rather have been told that the story was an invention of the boy's own mischievous brain. The fact was, the Honourable Mrs. Causton, wise woman of the world though she may have been, placed more faith in the old superstition herself than was good for her own peace of mind. Therefore, she could give no real comfort to Olive.

"I shall not die, shall I?" pleaded the little girl again. "That princess can't hurt me, can she?"

"No, no, of course not, darling. Don't think about it," grandma replied. "You are only a baby yet, my precious; we are not going to let you die till you are quite old—very old, I hope, Olive. You are well and strong yet, dear; but you must not think of foolish tales like this, or you may make yourself really ill."

She kissed Olive again and again, then bade her run and play, and be happy as the day was long. But the child was not happy, for all that. When she went to bed at night she was as much afraid as ever.

About this time, a friend made Olive a present of a new doll's house, very much larger and handsomer than the one she already possessed; and Mrs. Causton was delighted to find that the little girl's low-spirited indifference seemed, for the time at least, to be dissipated by the interesting question of how to furnish it.

Anxious, therefore, to keep her mind pleasantly occupied, grandma arranged for repeated excursions into Alderford, which was the nearest town, for the purchase of all kinds of things necessary for the tiny household. One day a drawing-room suite was the object of their search, and much discussion was held as to whether blue silk or crimson plush were the more elegant, and if, in the event of nothing pretty enough being obtainable, Watkins should try her hand at upholstery and re-cover the old suite with some lovely sea-green brocade that Mrs. Causton had left from a recent

dress. Another time the largest toy-shop in Alderford was ransacked to find a miniature toilet set that would "go" well with the mauve wall-paper of the best bedroom.

On the occasion of which I am now about to speak, the principal furnishing warehouse the town possessed was to be visited in search of carpet—real carpets—of design small enough to be suitable for the miniature rooms in "Daffodil Lodge," as the house was to be named, also some curtain binding, or something of the sort, that would represent carpet on the stairs.

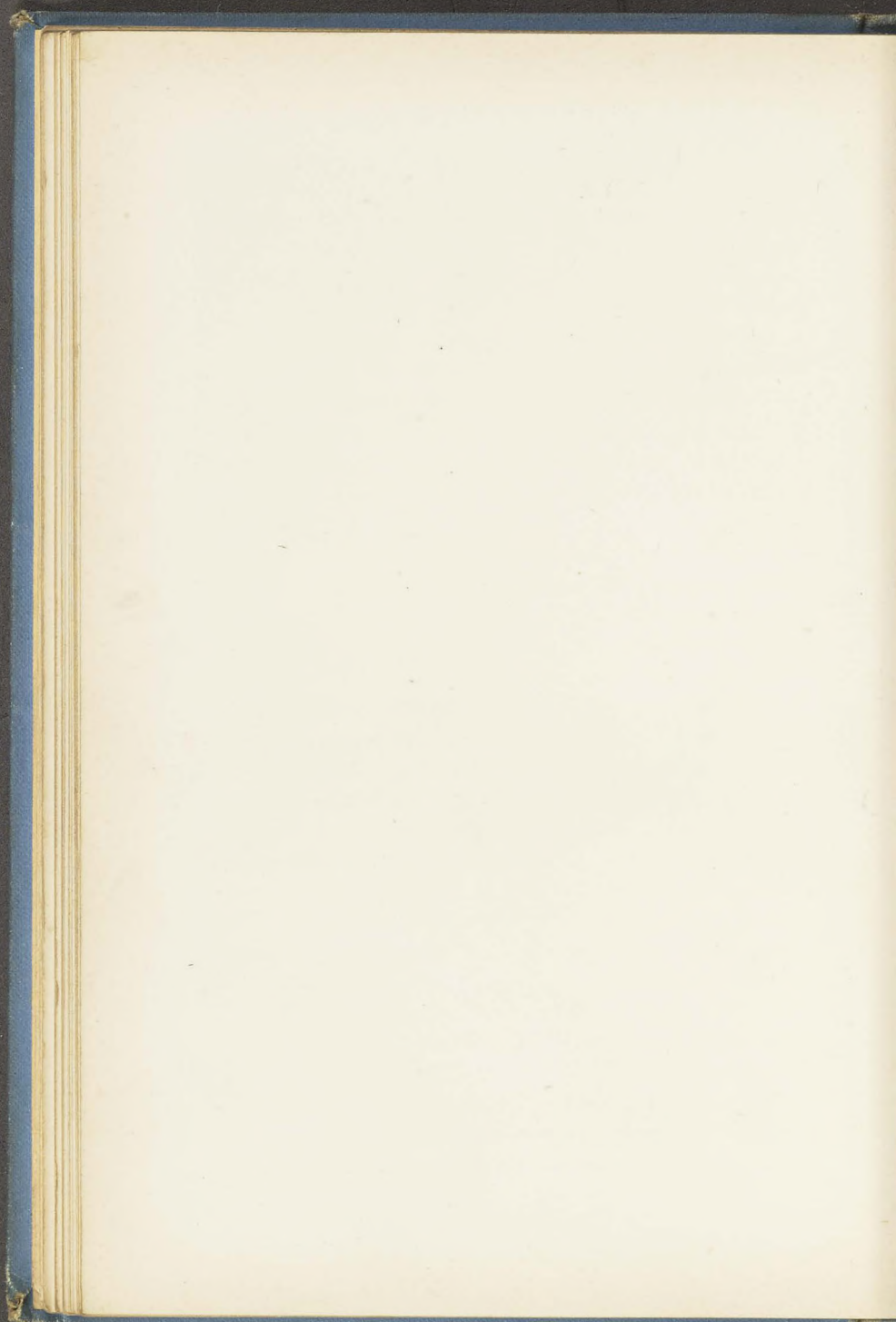
"We must keep her constantly amused until this unfortunate affair is forgotten," said Mrs. Causton, in an aside to Mademoiselle, as she bade Olive and the governess good-bye in the portico. "It is the only way; and I believe it will succeed better than any tonic Dr. Keen can give. She is looking quite bright to-day."

"I hope so," responded Mademoiselle, albeit not very confidently; for she, being constantly with Olive, witnessed many a fit of low spirits, and saw many a look of sudden terror, of which Mrs. Causton knew nothing. Often the child would break off in the midst of an animated conversation, especially if anything were said about "next Christmas," or "in a few months," and fall into a sad sort of reverie, of which her governess could only too well guess the cause.

To-day, however, she seemed more genuinely cheerful than her friends had seen her for some



"OLIVE, SCARED OUT OF HER SENSES, DASHED AWAY." [p. 64.]



time past, and chatted quite merrily, as they drove along, about rugs and antimacassars, and the lovely lace curtains she meant to have in the lady's boudoir.

After they had got through all their business at the carpet warehouse—though by no means according to Olive's glowing anticipations, for not a single carpet pattern was really tiny enough for so small a mansion—she recollected that she had intended to purchase a set of fire-irons for the nursery.

"I saw some *dear* little ones, with gilt tops, a penny a card," she said—"shovel, tongs and poker complete—when we were here the other day. They were at a toy-shop near the church. I think they would do beautifully."

"We will go and look at them," said Mademoiselle. "It will not hurt the horses to stand a while longer, on such a day as this."

The pair accordingly turned towards the right hand instead of the left, where their carriage stood. But they had not proceeded very far on their way to the toy-shop, when they met a number of persons running round from a side street, and the market-place suddenly became full of commotion.

"What is it? What can the matter be?" said Olive, nervously. "Oh, Mademoiselle, let us get in somewhere."

"It is probably nothing but some intoxicated person, or perhaps only a boy being taken off to

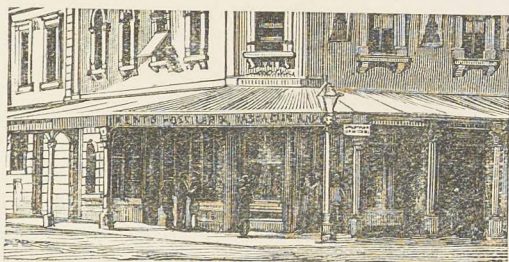
the police-station," returned the governess, who was not nervous, and considered it altogether beneath her dignity to hurry. "People so soon get excited."

She had scarcely spoken, however, when a huge black bull came tearing round the corner amid a cloud of dust, eyeballs glaring, tufted tail lashing the air, and great head lowered, ready to toss the first hapless creature that crossed its path.

Olive, scared out of her senses, dashed away from her governess's side, and was making for the churchyard opposite, which seemed to her the only safe place at the moment, when a spirited young horse, attached to a butcher's cart, frightened by the hubbub, almost simultaneously started off.

The mad bull on one hand, the wildly bounding horse on the other, and one frail little figure rushing blindly between!—it was a moment for many there to remember to their dying day.





CHAPTER IX.

A DOOR OF HOPE.

TERRIFIED by seeing a horse's head pulled suddenly up close above her, Olive swerved aside, and in her bewilderment would have darted immediately in front of the infuriated bull, but that a pair of arms were flung around her in just the nick of time, and she found herself hustled, almost carried on to the pavement, and across the threshold of a shop, the door of which was instantly shut with a slam that set a bell jingling madly somewhere over her head.

Recovering a little, she found herself standing in the midst of a varied collection of hoops, dolls, skipping-ropes and balls ; while a boy, rather bigger than herself, leaned against the counter, mopping his crimson face, and panting with excitement.

A pleasant-featured woman came out from the parlour behind the shop, followed by a pale, re-

fined-looking youth some years older than her rescuer.

"What is the matter, Lal? What's all the row about?" asked the latter; whilst the shopkeeper, who had been busy at the back of the house, and was therefore quite ignorant of the sudden commotion which had arisen in the street, calmly addressed Olive with, "Well, missie, and what can I get for you?"

"Mad bull!" cried the boy. "Maddest I've ever seen. Came round by Castle Street—gone tearing up to the bridge. She'd have been under his feet, sure as anything, or up in the air, in another jiffy, if I hadn't caught hold of her and whisked her in here."

"My dear! Really!" exclaimed Mrs. Westcott, for we need scarcely say it was she.

And Olive burst into tears.

"Come inside, my dear, and sit down," said Lal's mother, in kind concern. "Poor child! What a shock it must have given you!"

And taking the trembling Olive tenderly by the hand, she led her through an opening in the counter into the cosy room beyond.

"Now, Henry," she continued, addressing the pale-faced lad, "don't you get exciting yourself—you know you ought not to do it. Lal, shut the door, there's a good boy," for he had gone out again upon the step to look after the last of the crowd. "There, missie, sit down and rest, and I'll get you a glass of water."

"I guess I should have excited myself a trifle if I had been in time," answered Henry. "But I was so deep in a bit of 'niggle' in the corner of this frame that I knew nothing about it till it was all over."

At this point Mademoiselle appeared upon the scene, dreadfully frightened and upset by what she had witnessed of her charge's narrow escape. She, too, of course, was invited into the Westcotts' parlour, and accommodated with a seat.

"It was very, very wrong of you, Olive, to run away from me as you did," she said. "You rushed straight into the most dangerous position possible. It is by the merest chance that you are not at this moment lying crushed and dead."

Mademoiselle felt that if she did not relieve her own overwrought nerves by scolding Olive, she should go into hysterics; and she repeated again—"The merest chance!"

Henry's fair face flushed. He could not sit quietly by and hear the good providence of God so dishonoured without remonstrance.

"Don't you think it was our Father's care?" he gently asked. "That's better than chance."

Olive looked up wonderingly, through her tears.

"What father?" she asked, as the governess remained silent—offended somewhat at the presumption of this common lad in questioning a remark of *hers*.

"God, our Father in heaven," answered Henry. "You know He takes care of us, and keeps us often from danger, and harm, and death."

"Can He keep us from *dying*?" asked Olive, a new light shining in her eager eyes, for scarcely could a little heathen have been more ignorant of the things which are most worth knowing than this untutored child of luxury and wealth. "Can He really? Will He if I pray to Him?"

"Why, yes," returned the boy, startled by Olive's evident anxiety into greater freedom of speech on this topic than was usual to him. "It is God who keeps us alive every minute. If He did not, we should all die directly; and nobody can die until He sees it is the right time. It was not time for you to die just yet, so He sent my brother to save you from being killed by the bull."

"Are you *sure* it isn't time for me to die? Won't He let me?" queried the little girl, wistfully.

But Mademoiselle, who thought there had been quite enough of this kind of talk, took the opportunity of Mrs. Westcott's return from serving a customer, to say that they had now both rested sufficiently, and would trespass upon her hospitality no longer. "Our carriage," she said, "is waiting for us opposite Queen Street."

"Let my boy run and fetch it for you," said Mrs. Westcott. "He's not far away, and he'll be pleased."

And she went out to the shop door to look for Lal, who had taken himself out of the way of embarrassing thanks and praise the moment Mademoiselle arrived.

Olive would fain have resumed her conversation with Henry, but the governess effectually prevented this by remarking upon the beauty of his fretwork, and suggesting that perhaps he could make the tiny what-not which Olive so much wanted for her doll's house, but could not obtain.

The little girl seized upon this idea with delight, and had hardly finished explaining to Henry—who willingly undertook the work—exactly what she wanted (“a three-cornered what-not, with four shelves and pretty pillars, and as much open work as ever he could do”), when the carriage drove up to the door.

Mademoiselle graciously hinted that Olive's rescuer might expect shortly to hear from Mrs. Causton, and they bade the Westcotts farewell, the governess congratulating herself, first that no harm had befallen her heedless charge, and next that she had so cleverly put a stop to the “unhealthy ideas,” as she mentally termed them, with which “that canting carpenter boy” was trying to fill the child's head.

Olive was very quiet during the drive home, and her governess not unnaturally attributed this to a reaction after the fright; but the little girl's mind was busy on another subject. Henry's words had opened to her a door of hope that was

infinitely better than all the ill-judged efforts of her friends to banish the ugly legend from her thoughts. The ghostly princess might want to kill her, but if God were stronger than she, and were kind and good, she would appeal for protection to Him.

Such was, at least, the substance of Olive's meditation, and that night, before going to sleep, she prayed, "Oh, God, please don't let the dreadful princess kill me! Please keep her right away, and don't let her hurt me at all." And full of confidence in the unknown Power whose help she had sought, the child soon glided into a peaceful slumber, almost without fear.

She longed for the day to come on which the little "what-not" was to be finished. She wanted to see Henry again, and ask him more about that Father in heaven of whom he spoke with such reverent love. They had promised to call for the toy, and Mademoiselle was commissioned by Mrs. Causton not only to present Lionel with a sovereign for his rescue of Olive from her self-incurred peril, but to give Mrs. Westcott a large order for Berlin wools, wherewith to work a screen for a forthcoming bazaar.

Henry was not so well that day. He was lying on the sofa, unable to work. But the tiny what-not was finished and varnished complete—a perfect gem!

Olive was charmed when she saw it.

"It is a dear!" she cried. "It is just *sweet*."

But," she added, with one of those flashes of innate kindness which no amount of "spoiling" seemed able to wholly smother, "I do hope it hasn't made you worse—taking so much trouble with it, I mean?"

"Oh, no," replied the lad, "that doesn't hurt me a bit."

"Are you very ill?"

"They tell me I am."

"You are not going to die, are you?" pursued the child. Mademoiselle was engaged in the shop with Mrs. Westcott, choosing the wools. "God won't let you, will He?"

"I don't know," returned Henry, gravely. "Perhaps He will. Perhaps it is nearly time, you know."

"Aren't you frightened?"

"No."

"*Aren't* you?" cried Olive in amazement. "I should be awfully frightened to die. I've been asking God every night ever since I was here not to let me, because I thought I should have to."

"I was at first, rather," Henry said. "But as soon as I understood and believed that nobody need be, I felt that it was all right. I would like to get well, you know," he added, "for ever so many reasons; but if God sees it best for me not to, I'm not afraid."

"Why need nobody be?" Olive further queried, her new toy actually forgotten in the

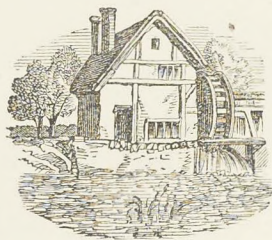
absorbing interest of this question, which affected her so closely. "People are."

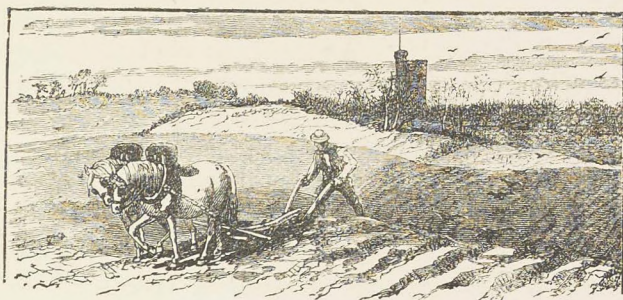
"Not people who believe in Jesus Christ," answered Henry, wondering in humble self-mistrust why the teaching of this eager little soul should have been given to him. "You know God forgives the sins of everybody who loves and trusts Him, and tries to do what He tells them—because Jesus died for us. And when our sins are all forgiven, you know," the boy went on, as Olive did not speak, "God is our very best Friend, and there is nothing left for us to be afraid of—least of all to go to Him."

"Will He forgive me?" asked the little girl.

But before another word could be uttered, Mrs. Westcott came into the parlour to say that Mademoiselle was quite ready to leave, and Olive's last question remained unanswered.

But enough had already been said to reach her inmost heart. Henry Westcott had been a missionary for God; his own suffering was beginning to bear fruit.





CHAPTER X.

ABOUT LAL.

WINNIE WESTCOTT'S strange discovery of the moonstone ring, and its still stranger disappearance without being seen by any eye but hers, was a nine days' talk at Broadmead Farm. The incident, after a little time had elapsed, seemed altogether so strange and unreal, that the child herself began to wonder again whether it could possibly have been only a dream, while the Carrs owned that they could not make it out at all. Mrs. Carr, indeed, though she did not commit her opinion to words, was at times half inclined to believe that imagination had, consciously or unconsciously, played a considerable part in the adventure.

Things having turned out so oddly, Winnie did not inform her family by letter of what had happened, but reserved the singular story until her return home a week later. On hearing the

tale, however, Mrs. Westcott decided that Mrs. Causton ought to be at once made acquainted with the circumstances of the case.

"What a pity," she said, "that you did not let us know sooner! We had little Miss Causton here with her governess a few days ago. Henry made her a toy what-not to order. Of course, Lal told you how he was able to save her from being tossed by the bull?"

No, Lal had not said a single word about it, though corresponding with his sister on behalf of himself and Henry too, twice or three times a week. For even the slight exertion of writing to Winnie was too much for the invalid, just then. The shy shrinking from being praised, which so often accompanies true heroism, had withheld the boy from relating the brave deed which had brought him both honour and reward.

So there was an astonishing story for Winnie to hear as well as one to tell, and very merrily their tongues wagged in the little shop-parlour on the first evening of her return to Alderford. But her pride in Lionel's prowess, and the joy of being with her dear ones again, was clouded by the sadly evident fact that Henry was much worse than when she left home not three weeks before. She could not help having a cry about it in her mother's arms, when the latter came in to kiss her after she had gone to bed.

"But he is so patient and bright," Mrs. Westcott said, trying to cheer her up. "I'm sure that the

beautiful, simple way in which he thinks of God and heaven, and his wonderful faith, have comforted me more than many a sermon. He is so sure that all must be well, because God cares. And then there's dear Lal," continued the widow, "if it had not been for Henry's illness, I should never have known what that boy could be. Since you've been away, Winnie, he has tried so hard to help. He has stayed at home of evenings and played chess with Henry so that he should not miss you and twice on a half-holiday he has given up his cricket to mind the shop while I went out for a breath of air. And the sovereign Mrs. Causton gave him, he would make me have—all but a shilling he kept for a microscope—to get beef-tea and extras for Henry. There's no doubt that times of trouble do bring out the best in us, and that, I think, must be one reason why they are sent."

These words reminded Winnie again of that talk about the vine, but as she did not think she could repeat it clearly enough for her mother to understand, she said nothing.

At first Mrs. Westcott thought she would write to Mrs. Causton direct about the ring; but on reflection decided, though perhaps not wisely, to inform instead her sister, from whom the jacket was obtained, and request her to communicate the circumstances to her friend the nurse.

The immediate result of this course was, that Mrs. Causton and Olive remained ignorant of the

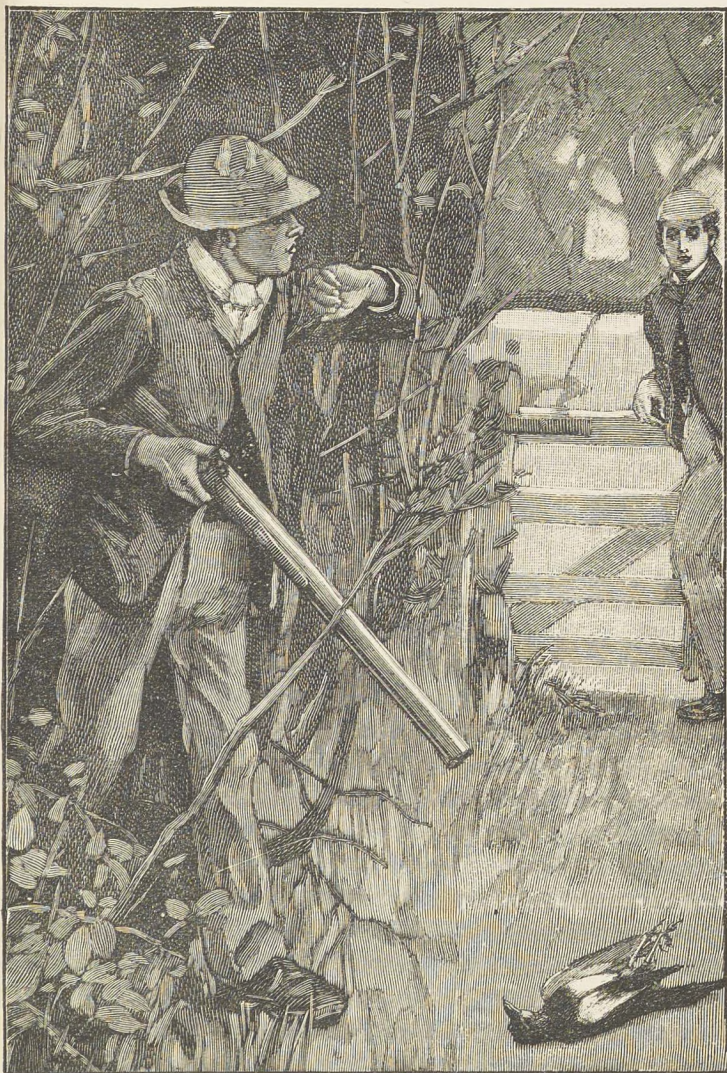
whole episode. For Nurse Barlow, fearing a reprimand for not having searched the pockets of the jacket before giving it away, and thinking that, since the ring was again lost, no good could come of confessing her negligence, said nothing about what she had heard.

In the autumn Lionel was invited to stay for a week or two at Broadmead Farm. He felt none of Winnie's affectionate reluctance to leave home, and stood on his head (literally) with delight at the prospect. But he was a boy, and a jolly one, and troubled with no misgivings about the future. If the "giving up of his grand treat would have done his sick brother an atom of good, I am sure Lal would have relinquished it without a murmur. As it was, he promised to send home "heaps of blackberries," of which Henry was particularly fond—"a hamper 'most every day"—and gaily said "good-bye."

After the train had started he put his head out of the carriage window to bawl: "I say! I wonder what sort of an adventure *I* shall have? *Something* ought to happen!"

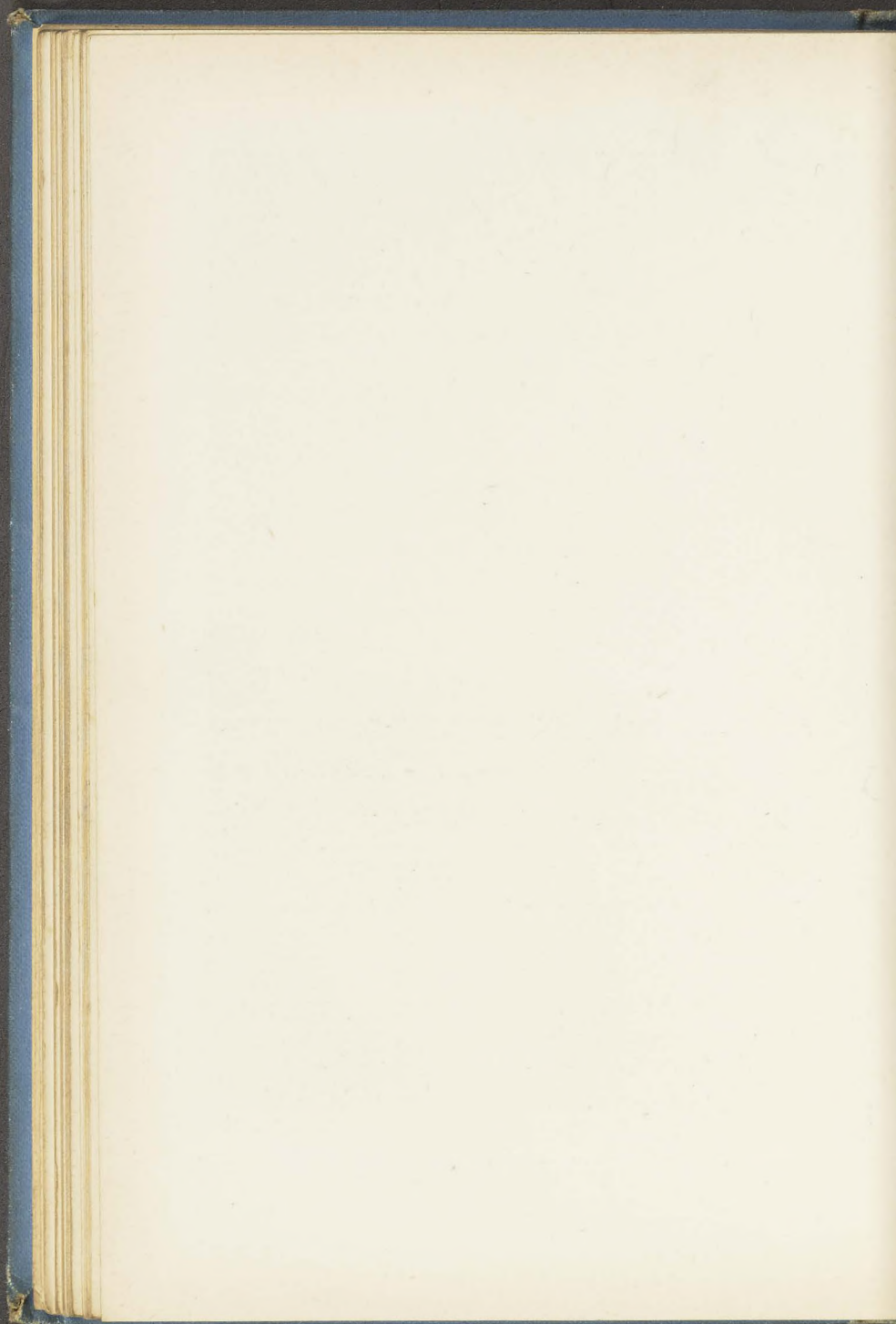
In reply to which Winnie shook her head, and nodded, raised her eyebrows and frowned, most bewilderingly, as long as Lal's face was in sight. But little either of them guessed what the fulfilment of the boy's ambition would be.

Lal found Cloverdale quite equal to Winnie's glowing descriptions, and in some respects even surpassing them. How could she, for instance,



"A LAD CAME CRASHING THROUGH THE THICKET."

[p. 80.]



have dwelt so minutely on the tame doings of the household cat and kittens, yet never have said one word about the "lark" it was when Mr. Carr wanted to catch the grazing pony? What was she doing pottering about the place all day, and yet never discovering that a slow-worm lived in the orchard, which the farmer, in emulation of his hero, Canon Kingsley, would not allow to be destroyed? And the very idea of her spending her time "messaging" with the butter-pats, while a boat and oars lay idle in the pond at the end of the lane! Lal concluded, with good-humoured contempt, that it was "just like a girl," and made up his mind that *he* would not miss anything worth finding out within five miles of the homestead if *he* could help it.

The first morning of his stay he was out betimes, and having seen the cows milked, and the pigs fed, and courageously ridden "Smiler," the biggest of the farm horses, to water, went off on a voyage of discovery for himself, until breakfast time.

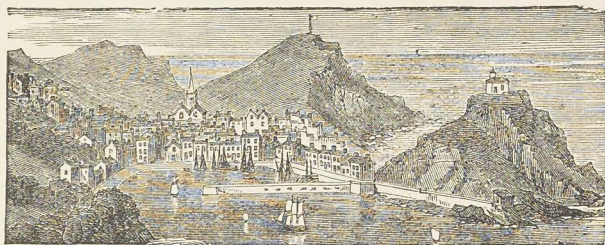
The nearest house to Broadmead Farm was the neat cottage tenanted by a gamekeeper in the employ of a wealthy gentleman whose grounds adjoined those of Farmer Carr. Lal was just leaning against its rustic fence, made of unbarked branches of pine, lost in admiration of a brood of the loveliest little bantam fowls he had ever seen, when the sharp report of a gun rang through the air, so close to where he stood that for the moment,

as he afterwards confessed, he almost fancied he was shot.

Then a stout, freckled lad rather bigger than himself came crashing through a thicket hard by and made straight for what looked like a dead bird lying in the road.

Lal had a tender heart, that loved all living things, and hated the thought of slaughter. Hot with sudden indignation at what seemed to him a wanton murder, he hurried to the same spot, quite prepared to "pitch into" the youthful sportsman, and "teach him a lesson" without a moment's delay.





CHAPTER XI.

STARTLING NEWS.

"GRANDMA, do you know what to-day is?"

Mrs. Causton, who had been seated in her motionless Bath-chair, dreamily watching from beneath her sunshade the launching of a sailing yacht in the blue waters of Sandown Bay, withdrew her gaze from the animated scene upon the beach, and looked fondly into the dear child-face at her side.

How much good a month at the sea, with freedom to roam the breezy slopes, or build castles on the sandy shore, or ride her pony up and down the flower-besprinkled lanes, seemed to have wrought in Olive! How rounded and rosy-brown her cheeks had grown! how merry her bright dark eyes! Comparing in her own mind this healthy, happy maiden with the pale, wretched, nervous little invalid of six or eight weeks before, Mrs. Causton congratulated herself

on her own correct judgment in the case. "I was sure the child only wanted change of air and scene, and something fresh to occupy her thoughts," she remarked to Mademoiselle nearly every day, "and you see I was quite right."

"What is to-day, love?" she repeated, in reply to Olive's question. "Thursday, is it not? The sixteenth of October, eighteen hundred and ninety, if you wish me to be very accurate."

"Don't you remember something else about it?" pursued the child, leaning against the chair, and caressing Mrs. Causton's pet puggie, who dozed in her arms.

"No, I cannot recall any particular circumstance connected with the date," the lady rather languidly replied. "I hope it is not anybody's birthday—is it, Olive?—which I ought to have noticed."

"Oh, no," answered Olive, adding, after a moment's pause, and with her long lashes cast shyly down. "It is just three months to-day, grandma dear, since I lost your moonstone ring."

"Really! How strange that you should have remembered it, love! I did not."

"And you know what the legend said?" Olive went on. "About what would happen at the end of three months. Don't you, grandma?"

A look of annoyance came over Mrs. Causton's face.

"I trust, Olive," she said, somewhat impatiently, "that you are not going to begin thinking of that

foolish tale again, and make yourself ill now you are so much better. I had hoped that nonsense was all forgotten."

"I don't mind thinking of it now, grandma," returned the child, "because the three months are over, and I'm all right. And I rather like to think of it, because I'm sure it must be God Himself who has taken care of me, and not let the cruel princess hurt me, as I asked Him to, and I love Him for it."

"I wish you would not allow your mind to dwell upon the subject at all, my love," said Mrs. Causton uneasily. "A little girl like you need not think about anything but her lessons or her play."

"But it's nice to think about God taking care of me," persisted Olive. "I'm certain He must be good, as that boy at the toy-shop said He was; and I should like to know more about Him."

"You must attend to what is said in church," replied her grandmother, rather vaguely.

"Yes; but, grandma dear," said Olive, coaxingly, "there's a dear little service that a gentleman has on the beach of a morning sometimes, and the children—lots of them—sit all round; and he talks to them, and they sing such pretty hymns, and he tells them all about God, and how kind He is. I've seen them often, but Mademoiselle won't let me stop and listen. But she will if you say I may. Please do!"

"I have no particular objection," Mrs. Causton

replied. "I will ask Mademoiselle to take you to one of these meetings if you would really care to go."

"Thank you, grandma, ever so much."

And from that time forward, as long as the Caustons remained at Sandown, the seashore gatherings of the Children's Special Service Mission had no more regular attendant or more attentive listener than Olive. She would sit with her large eyes fixed upon the speaker's face, drinking in the new, sweet story of the Saviour's love, as a little thirsty plant drinks in the dew. In her heart, indeed, the seed fell upon good ground; and although, as her mind grew more enlightened, she gradually came to believe less in the ghost story connected with the moonstone ring, her faith in the tender, ever-watchful care of the Almighty Father was deepened and confirmed. Through the loss of that earthly jewel of little value, she had found a heavenly treasure—the Pearl beyond price.

One morning, only a few days before the date fixed upon for the Caustons' return home, a letter arrived at Sandown, which caused great interest and surprise.

It was from Mrs. Westcott, and gave information of the recovery of the lost ring.

The writer evidently supposed that Mrs. Causton already knew of the finding and second disappearance of the jewel at Broadmead Farm, and went on to say that she thought the letter of

her son Lionel to his sister, in which he described how the ring was once more brought to light would explain matters better than anything she could say.

The boyish epistle, which was enclosed, ran as follows:—

“MY DEAR WIN,—The rummiest thing in the world has just happened—I’ve found that ring! And where do you think it was? You’d never guess. Well, this morning I was out in the road at the side of the farm, and I saw a fellow shoot a bird, a nice sort of bird, and I felt wild. It was a magpie, one of the prettiest creatures you ever saw. And when I saw its eyes shut, and all blood on its feathers, I should have just liked to have given that chap a good licking. So I said, what did he do it for? And he said it was a thief, and killed all their young chickens, bantams—I’d seen them over the fence, such beauties!—and how his father had said he was to shoot it if he could. And he asked who I was—pretty civil about it he was—and I said I was staying at Farmer Carr’s; and he said Mr. Carr would be glad the bird was dead, because it might have gone after his chickens, too. And he showed me where its nest was—a great, big thing like a rough sort of basket, not a bit like our robin’s nest in the ivy—up a fir-tree, pretty high; and he said they were nasty, mischievous things; and then it was breakfast time.

"Well, while I was hunting for caterpillars down the lane, after breakfast, it came into my head all of a sudden that perhaps that magpie had got little young ones, and perhaps they'd be starved. You know our robin has lots of broods in the year, and some quite late. Mr. Carr says that magpies never have more than one, and that is in the spring, but I didn't know that then. And I couldn't bear the thought of the poor little mites crying for food, and their mother shot dead. And I thought how pleased you'd be to have them to rear by hand. So I said to myself, 'That tree'll be a sort of a caution to climb, but I've been up pretty nigh every tree near our place at home,' and there was a fence just close by, which would be a lot of help, and I made up my mind to try it. It *was* a stiff climb, and so I tell you. If you or mother had seen me hanging on, you'd have had a fit. I nearly lost my hold one time. But I got the nest, and inside it (there were no birds) *I found that ring!*

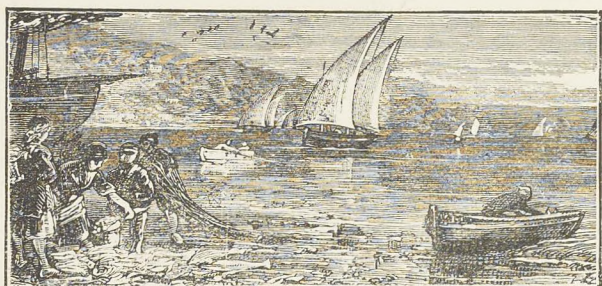
"Mrs. Carr says the magpie must have been attracted by the sparkle of it in the sun—you know you said the sun was shining, and you put it close to the open window. And birds, magpies and daws in particular, do like bright things. (You know that old 'Jackdaw of Rheims.') And he must have nipped hold of it and carried it away when you were out of the room.

"And, now, what do you think of all that?"

"*I think*," said Olive, as Mrs. Causton finished reading the letter aloud to her, "that Lionel Westcott is the most splendid boy I ever heard of! He's always doing brave things. He saved me from that mad bull, and now he's been climbing up a tremendously high tree to look after some poor little birds. I call it sweet of him! And it was just the same, wasn't it, as though the birds were there? And I *am* glad he has found your ring. Aren't you glad that it is found, grandma?"

"Of course I am, love. It has been a very singular affair from beginning to end, and the climax is not the least remarkable part of it. We must see that this noble lad is suitably recompensed for his trouble."





CHAPTER XII.

REWARDED.

"YOU must tell Lal to think of something he would very much like. It doesn't matter how expensive it would be. Grandma says she wants to give him a really handsome reward, and he must choose it himself."

Thus spoke Olive Causton to Winnie Westcott, as the two girls grew friendly together among the dolls and balls in the little shop at Alderford, when Mademoiselle next called there in reply to the widow's letter about the ring.

"Oh!" said Winnie, with a sort of gasp, and then stopped short.

"Have you thought of something?" asked Olive. "It doesn't matter what it is, he can have it. Grandma promised me she wouldn't say 'no' to *anything*. Because, you know," the child went on, "I do think Lal is a splendid boy, and I don't think grandma sent him half nor a quarter enough

of a present for saving me from the bull. I don't believe she really understood how very brave it was, because he might have been tossed himself, mightn't he?"

"I know what *I* should choose, if it were me," Winnie answered, slowly. "And I think Lal would like that, too; but of course I'm not quite sure."

"What is it?" queried Olive, eagerly. "Is it a watch and chain, or a big box of paints, or only money? Perhaps it is a pony?"

"Oh, no, nothing like that," smiled Winnie, shaking her head. "I'm afraid it would cost a great deal."

"I tell you that doesn't matter," returned the little lady, rather impatiently. "You must say what it is."

"Well, you see," began Winnie, reluctantly, "it wouldn't be really for himself at all, but for Henry. The doctor said nothing would cure Henry but a sea voyage, and of course mother can't afford that."

"Would that cost more than a watch and chain, or a pony?" asked Olive, with childish ignorance.

"Oh, yes, I think so."

"Well, anyhow," said Olive, "I believe he can have it. If I tell grandma how it is, I'm sure she won't refuse—she never refuses me anything. And, besides, this time she promised. Would it be sure to make Henry well?"

"Come, now, Olive," interrupted Mademoiselle. "Have you selected your little dolls for Daffodil Lodge?"

"No. But never mind them now," Olive replied. "We can come again. I want to make haste home and speak to grandma. To be able to make Henry well would be—just *lovely*! And he is so good!"

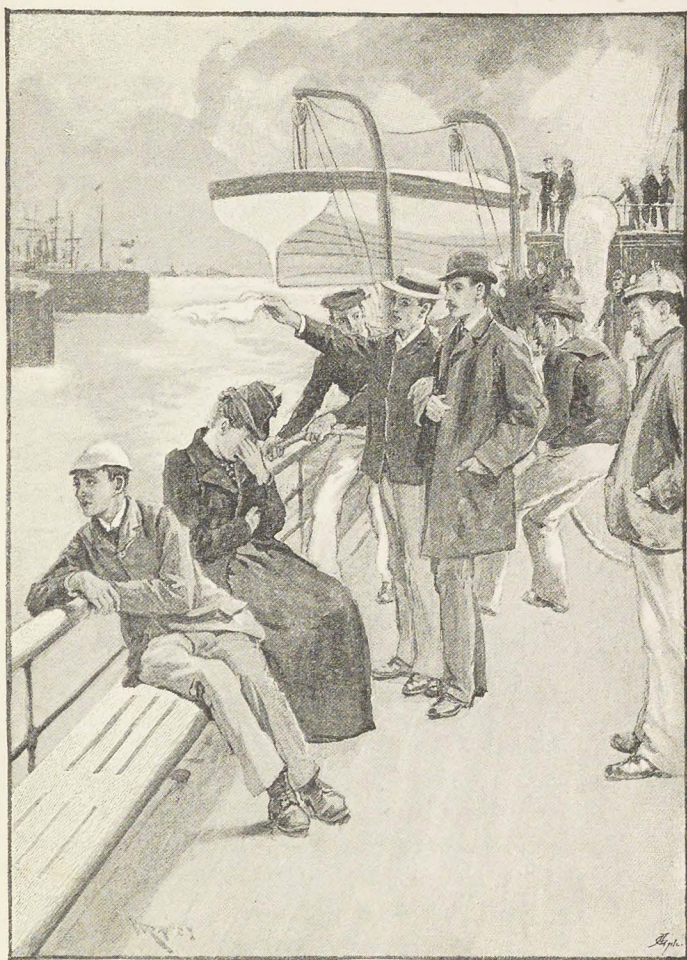
Two days after the above interview the Causton carriage again drove up to the door of Widow Westcott's shop. And this time the Honourable Mrs. Causton herself stepped out.

Her stately presence and handsome attire seemed almost to fill up the tiny parlour into which she was ushered, but the lady was graciousness itself, and soon put the simple shopkeeper thoroughly at her ease. Winnie and Lal were both at school at the time, and Henry was upstairs lying down.

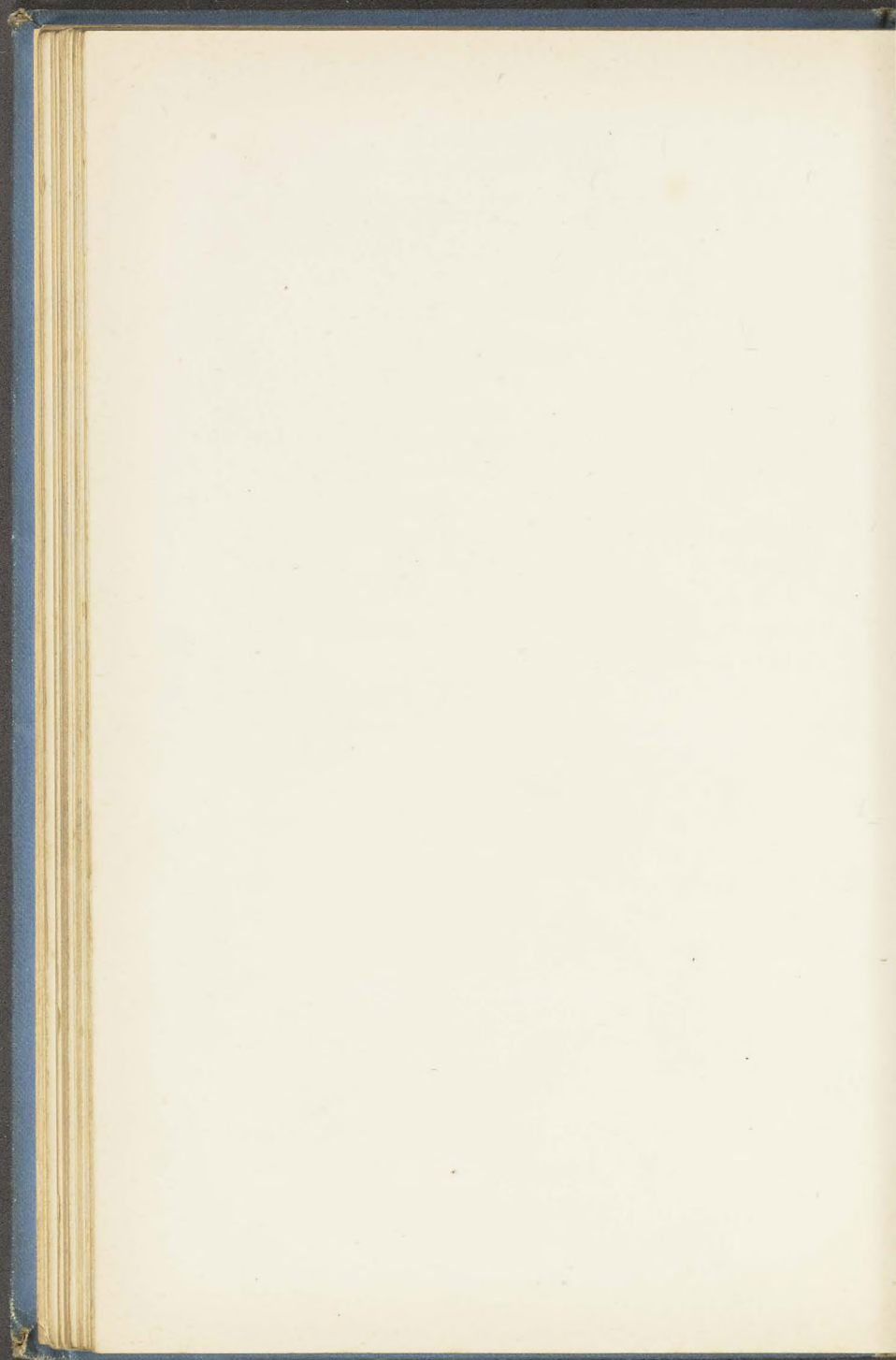
After a few preliminary enquiries, Mrs. Causton said, "Now, Mrs. Westcott, I have a proposal to make to you. My little grand-daughter—a sweet kind-hearted child, as you have no doubt observed—has taken, I must tell you, a very great fancy to all your family, and especially to your eldest son, who, I understand, is in weak health—consumptive, if I have been informed aright?"

Mrs. Westcott sighed, "Ah, yes, poor dear!" and sadly shook her head.

"And Olive tells me that a sea voyage has been recommended. May I ask whose advice it was? By whom has your son been attended?"



“HENRY, STANDING ON THE DECK, WAS SMILING TOO.” [p. 93.]



"I took him in the summer to Dr. Dursley, at Pimlico. It was he who ordered a voyage."

"Indeed! I know Dr. Dursley very well," said Mrs. Causton, looking decidedly reassured. "You had better let him see your son again, Mrs. Westcott, mentioning my name. And if he is still of the opinion that a voyage—say to New Zealand—would be beneficial, I think something may perhaps be arranged. I will gladly assist you, if I can."

* * * * *

It was on a clear, bright morning, more like mid-autumn than the third week in December, that a crowd of people stood on the landing stage of one of our great docks, waving farewell to the passengers on board a huge, ocean-going steamer which had just begun to move from the side of the quay. The bell rang, the great cable was unloosed from its mooring, the brown foam rushed churning out from beneath the mighty keel, and the strip of dull green water every moment grew wider between the parting friends.

Among those left behind were Winnie Westcott, with her mother, and Lal, the former smiling and nodding bravely, with eyes full of tears, while the boy waved a pink-bordered handkerchief tied to the end of an umbrella, until, in his energy, he whisked it off, and it went floating away in the wake of the receding ship.

Henry, standing on the deck, by the side of the good friend with whom he was to travel, and half-supported by him, was smiling too, like the sun

through a winter cloud. It had been far harder for him to say "good-bye" to his dear ones in the then weak state of his body and nerves, than to resign himself to the thought of dying in their midst. Still, he tried earnestly never to forget that being the ordering of God, it must turn out for the best.

Winnie, cuddling tenderly against her mother as at length they turned away, said softly: "I'm not afraid now, not a bit. I'm sure God wouldn't have given Henry the sea voyage in such a wonderful way, if He did not mean it to make him well. Do you think He would?"

"I hardly think so. I trust it will be blessed," replied the widow, fearing even now to hope too much. "It really has been wonderful, how it has all come round—truly marvellous!"

"It was so funny, wasn't it?" said Lal, "that Mrs. Causton should have such a kind brother out there. He must be a tremendously good man to take such an interest in a stranger as to offer to let Henry stay with him before ever he knows whether he will be of any use to him or not. And it may, anyhow, be a good while before Henry is well enough to do anything for him."

"I imagine, from what Mrs. Causton said, that Mr. Weir must be a true Christian, and most benevolent," answered his mother. "She told me that he is always doing good, and helping people. He took an interest in Henry's case directly he heard of it. And happening to want a young

assistant at the same time, it all worked in together just as if it had been prepared beforehand, as of course it had, by the kind providence of God. Yes, Winnie," she concluded, "I cannot help thinking, with you, that there is a good time coming for our dear Henry ; better, perhaps, than if he had never been ill."

"We must pray now, mustn't we?" said Winnie, "that Henry may be able to do the work, and be a great deal of use to Mr. Weir. Two years will soon slip away, and then we shall have him back again. How nice that will be!"

* * * * *

The two years have almost slipped away since Winnie Westcott uttered the foregoing words ; and the petitions of those loving hearts on behalf of their dear one have been most graciously fulfilled. Henry not only bore the voyage extremely well, but after the first week or so out at sea an improvement commenced, which continued until his arrival at Christchurch. And there has been no going back. He enjoys his work, which is that of helping his beloved friend, Mr. Weir, in his interesting pursuit of collecting and classifying the wild flowers and fruits of the South Island ; and though longing to see home again, he frankly says that he will be sorry when it comes to an end. The other day he sent Winnie a photograph of himself, in which he appears as a broad-shouldered, robust-looking young man, with a perceptible moustache ! She is delighted with the picture, and kisses it night

and morning ; but she wrote and told Henry that if he comes back to England with a dusting-brush over his mouth, she is sure she shan't be able to kiss *him*.

Little Miss Olive often has occasion to pay a visit to the shop at Alderford, and she and Winnie are true friends, to the advantage, in different ways, of both. Winnie once told her about the pruned vine at Broadmead Farm, and though some of the things the minister's wife said about it still puzzle them, they are both old enough and sensible enough to see how much good has come to each through what seemed, at the time, a dreadful trouble. Nor to them alone. Thoughtful Henry, too, and merry Lal, not to speak of Mrs. Westcott herself, have learned to believe in the goodness of God, and His readiness to hear prayer, as they never could but for the painful lessons that bygone summer brought.

THE END.

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